

MINOTAUR COMICS

# SPIKE

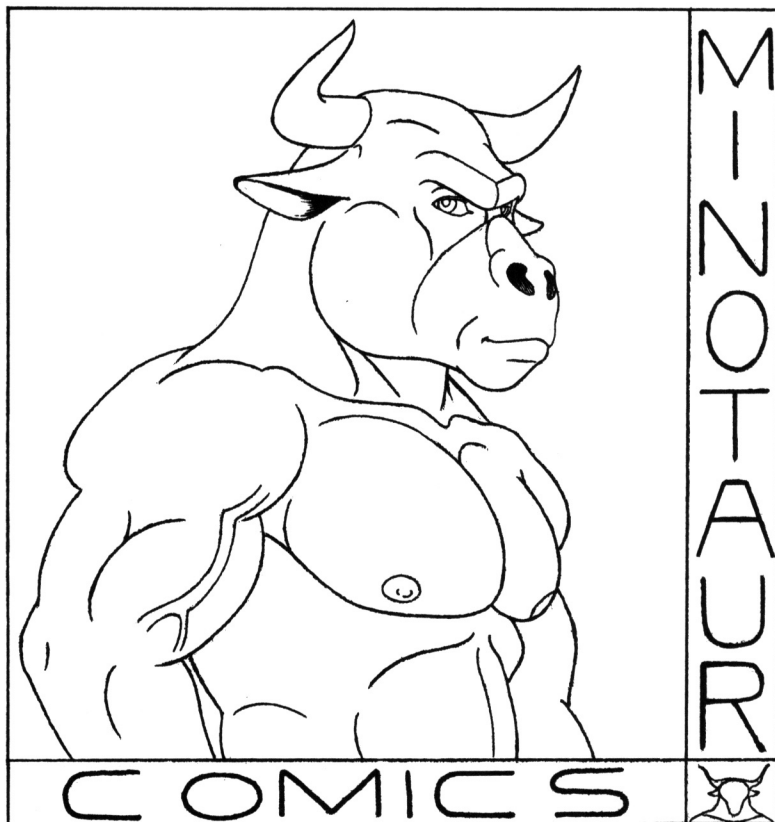
# 1

plus  
AFTEREARTH 

ADULTS  
ONLY







102  


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**SPIKE**







# SPIKE

WHAT COULD POSSIBLY BE WORSE THAN BEING BORN INTO THIS AMERICA OF OURS DEFORMED? WHAT? THAT'S NOT SO BAD? OH. NO ONE HERE WOULD CARE. THIS IS A FREE COUNTRY AND WE DON'T DISCRIMINATE AGAINST SOMEONE BECAUSE OF THE WAY THEY LOOK. OH.

WELL, WHAT IF THIS GUY HERE SOLD SOPHISTICATED WEAPONS TO THE ENEMIES OF OUR NATION SO HE COULD THEN BUY WEAPONS FOR AN ULTRA RIGHT WING TERRORIST GROUP TRYING TO OVERTHROW THE GOVERNMENT OF SOME OTHER COUNTRY. WHAT? THAT WOULD BE O.K.?

WELL, WHAT IF THIS GUY KNEW ABOUT A HORRIBLE DISEASE THAT WAS KILLING THOUSANDS OF PEOPLE AND HAD THE POWER TO DO SOMETHING ABOUT IT, BUT JUST IGNORED THE PROBLEM. HUH? THAT WOULD BE O.K., TOO? AS LONG AS THE RIGHT PEOPLE WERE DYING. OH, I SEE.

WELL, WHAT IF THIS GUY WAS PREACHING ON T.V., AND COLLECTING MILLIONS OF DOLLARS AND LIVING LIKE A KING WHILE TEACHING MILLIONS OF PEOPLE TO HATE OTHERS BECAUSE OF THEIR POLITICS OR SOCIAL VALUES. THEN, HE GOT CAUGHT WITH HIS POLKA-DOT SKIVIES DOWN WITH AN UGLY WHORE?

HUH? THAT'D BE O.K.? WE HAVE FREEDOM OF RELIGION HERE AND NO ONE'S GONNA ARGUE WITH THE MONEY?

WELL WHAT IF I TOLD YOU THAT SPIKE, HERE,

WAS GAY? WHAT? YOU'D WHAT?! YOU'D CUT OUT HIS WHAT?! YOU'D HANG HIM UP BY HIS WHAT?! YOU'D GET A GUN AND ....



WE CATCH UP WITH SPIKE AND HIS FRIEND, ADRIAN, ON FRIDAY EVENING LEAVING THE GYM WHERE THEY ALWAYS WORK OUT TOGETHER.

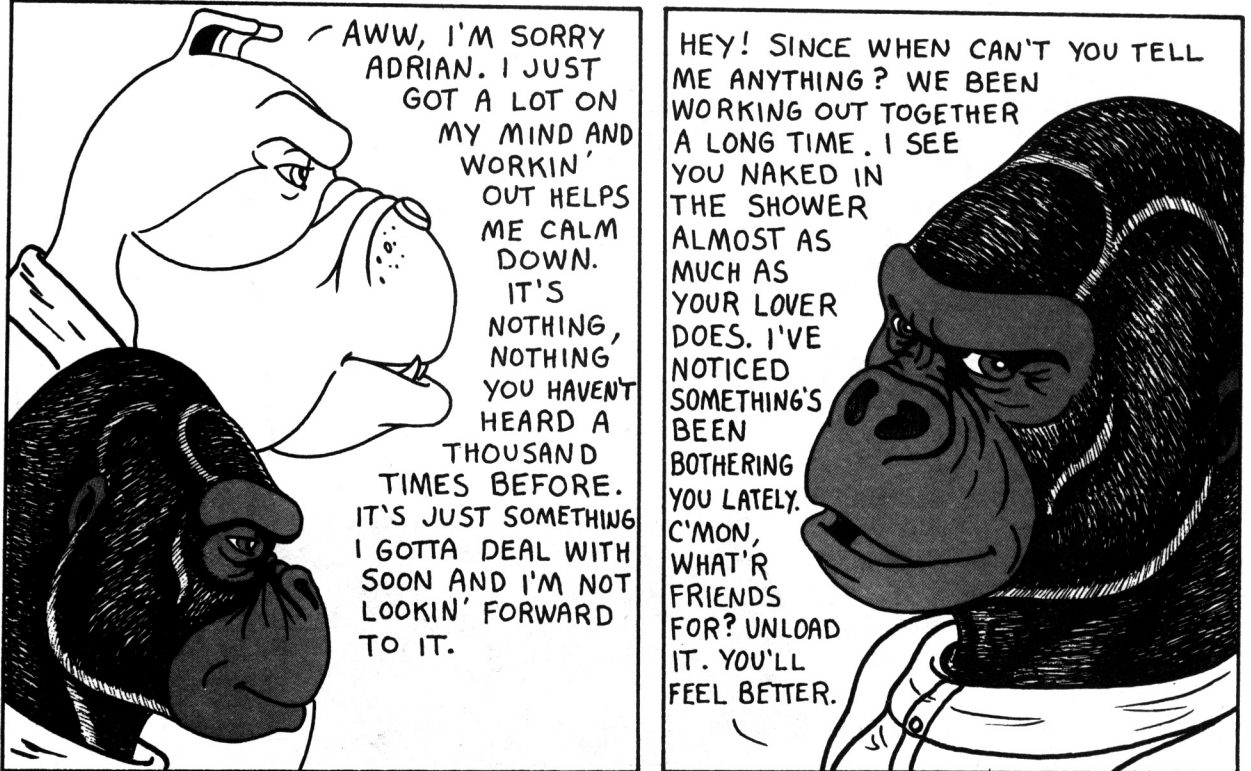
SPIKE, YOU'VE BEEN AWFULLY QUIET THIS EVENING. PUMPING IRON LIKE A DEMON TOO. YOU'RE PROBABLY GONNA BE SORE AS HELL TOMORROW. IS ANYTHING WRONG?

ELEVENTH STREET GYM

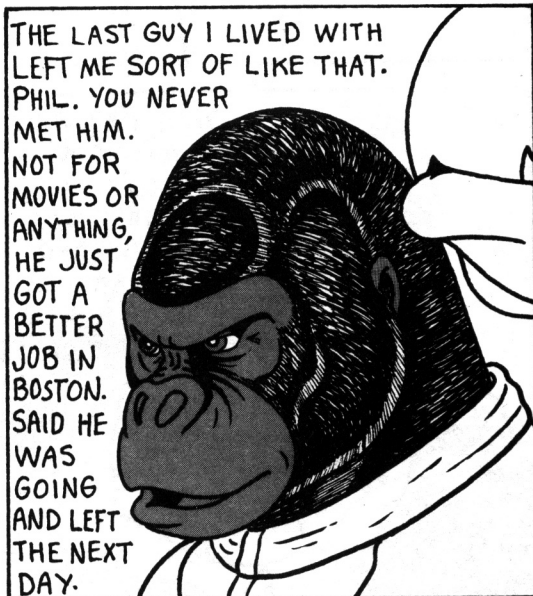


— AWW, I'M SORRY ADRIAN. I JUST GOT A LOT ON MY MIND AND WORKIN' OUT HELPS ME CALM DOWN. IT'S NOTHING, NOTHING YOU HAVEN'T HEARD A THOUSAND TIMES BEFORE. IT'S JUST SOMETHING I GOTTA DEAL WITH SOON AND I'M NOT LOOKIN' FORWARD TO IT.

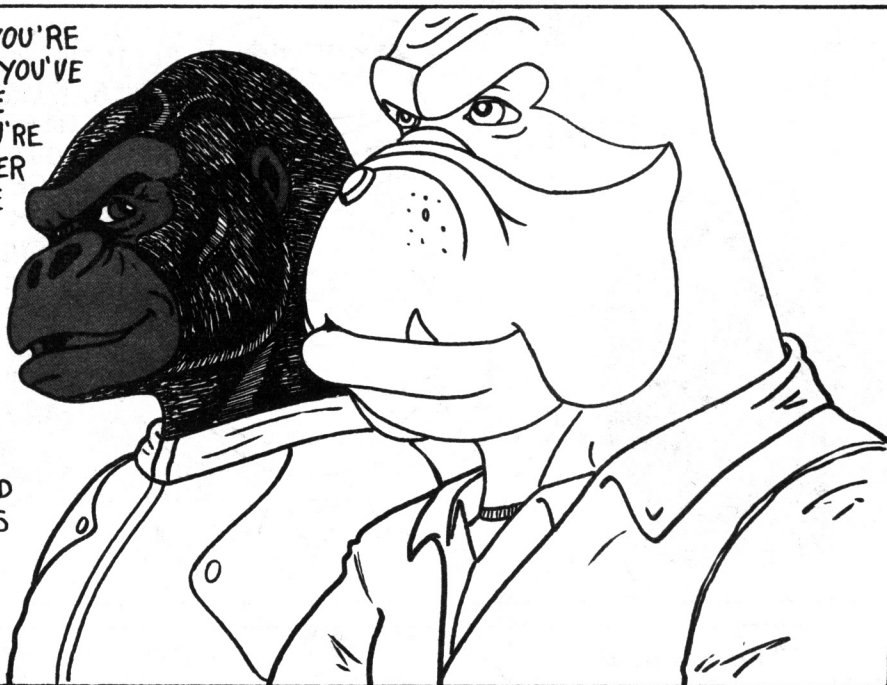
HEY! SINCE WHEN CAN'T YOU TELL ME ANYTHING? WE BEEN WORKING OUT TOGETHER A LONG TIME. I SEE YOU NAKED IN THE SHOWER ALMOST AS MUCH AS YOUR LOVER DOES. I'VE NOTICED SOMETHING'S BEEN BOTHERING YOU LATELY. C'MON, WHAT'R FRIENDS FOR? UNLOAD IT. YOU'LL FEEL BETTER.







WELL OF COURSE IT IS! YOU'RE SUPPOSED TO SAY 'OH, YOU'VE BEEN FUCKED OVER LIKE THAT TOO', AND THEN YOU'RE SUPPOSED TO FEEL BETTER BECAUSE YOU NOW REALIZE YOU'RE PART OF THE CLUB. C'MON SPIKE, EVERYONE IN THE "ROUGH" COMMUNITY KNOWS THIS STORY BY HEART. MORE THAN THAT, WHAT ROUGH DO YOU KNOW WHO'S HAD A RELATIONSHIP WITH A 'SMOOTHIE' THAT'S LASTED HALF AS LONG AS YOURS AND BRIAN'S'?



YEAH, I KNOW WHAT YOU MEAN. BUT, DON'T YA SEE, THAT MAKES IT HARDER, NOT EASIER.

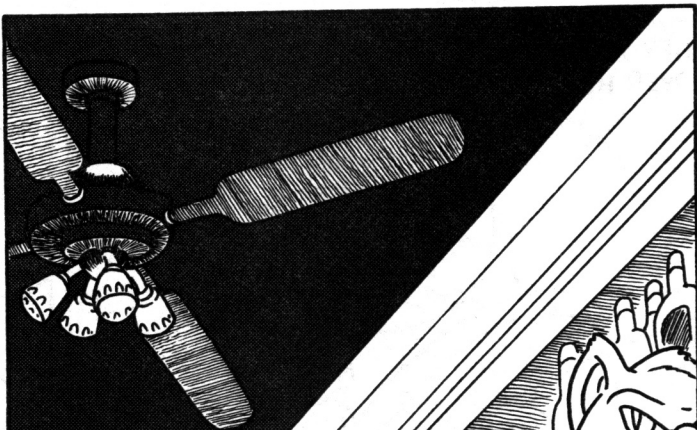
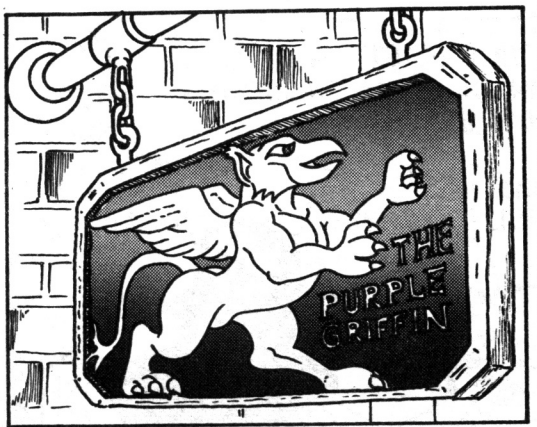
WHEN I LINKED UP WITH BRIAN IT WAS THE BEST THING THAT EVER HAPPENED TO ME. WE'VE BEEN, WELL, WE'VE BEEN HAPPY FOR A LONG TIME AND NOW, NOW IT HAS TO END. NOT BECAUSE OF ANYTHING I DID, BUT BECAUSE I DON'T FIT IN WITH A NEW LIFESTYLE.



HOLD IT! HOLD IT! I CAN SEE WHERE THIS IS HEADED RIGHT NOW. NUTHIN' BUT SOME SERIOUS DRINKING IS GONNA MAKE YOU FEEL BETTER. SO LET'S CUT OUT THE MIDDLEMEN AND HEAD STRAIGHT FOR THE BAR!







AHHH. MY FAVORITE  
"STAR WARS" BAR.

HEY YOU TWO,  
OVER HERE.



HI YA GARRETT. WHAT'S  
GOIN' ON? ANY SMOOTHIES  
SHOW UP YET?

NAH. IT'S  
STILL TOO EARLY.



SO, WHAT'S GOT YOU TWO  
OUT ON A NASTY NIGHT LIKE  
THIS? I HAVEN'T SEEN  
EITHER OF YOU FOR A  
LONG TIME.

AHH, YOU KNOW. I'VE  
BEEN LAYING LOW.  
WE JUST CAME FROM THE  
GYM AND I DRAGGED  
SPIKE IN TO BOOZE HIM UP  
BEFORE HE  
GOES HOME.  
HE'S GOT  
MARITAL  
PROBLEMS.  
BRIAN'S  
LEAVING.

HEY, ARLO!  
TWO FOSTERS  
OVER HERE  
PLEASE.



YOU'RE KIDDING. AFTER, WHAT IS IT, NINE, TEN YEARS? BOY, I'VE KNOWN A LOTTA GUYS I WOULDN'T HAVE THOUGHT WOULD LAST BUT YOU TWO...., WHAT HAPPENED?



AHHH, NOW, DON'T GET YER HACKELS UP. IT'S JUST A CAREER CHANGE. BRIAN'S GOTTA MOVE OUT TO THE WEST COAST AND I CAN'T GO, THAT'S ALL.



WHY CAN'T YOU? DID HE TELL YOU THAT? WHAT'S SO IMPORTANT HE HASTA WALK OUT ON YOU?



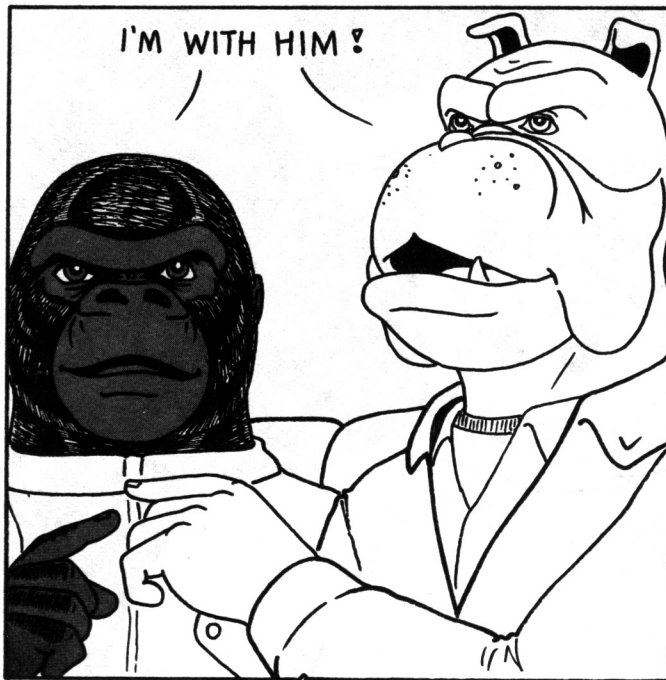
HEY, CALM DOWN. HE'S NOT JUST WALKING OUT. THIS THING CAME UP; HE'S GOT A CHANCE AT SOMETHING REALLY BIG AND I'D BE IN THE WAY.







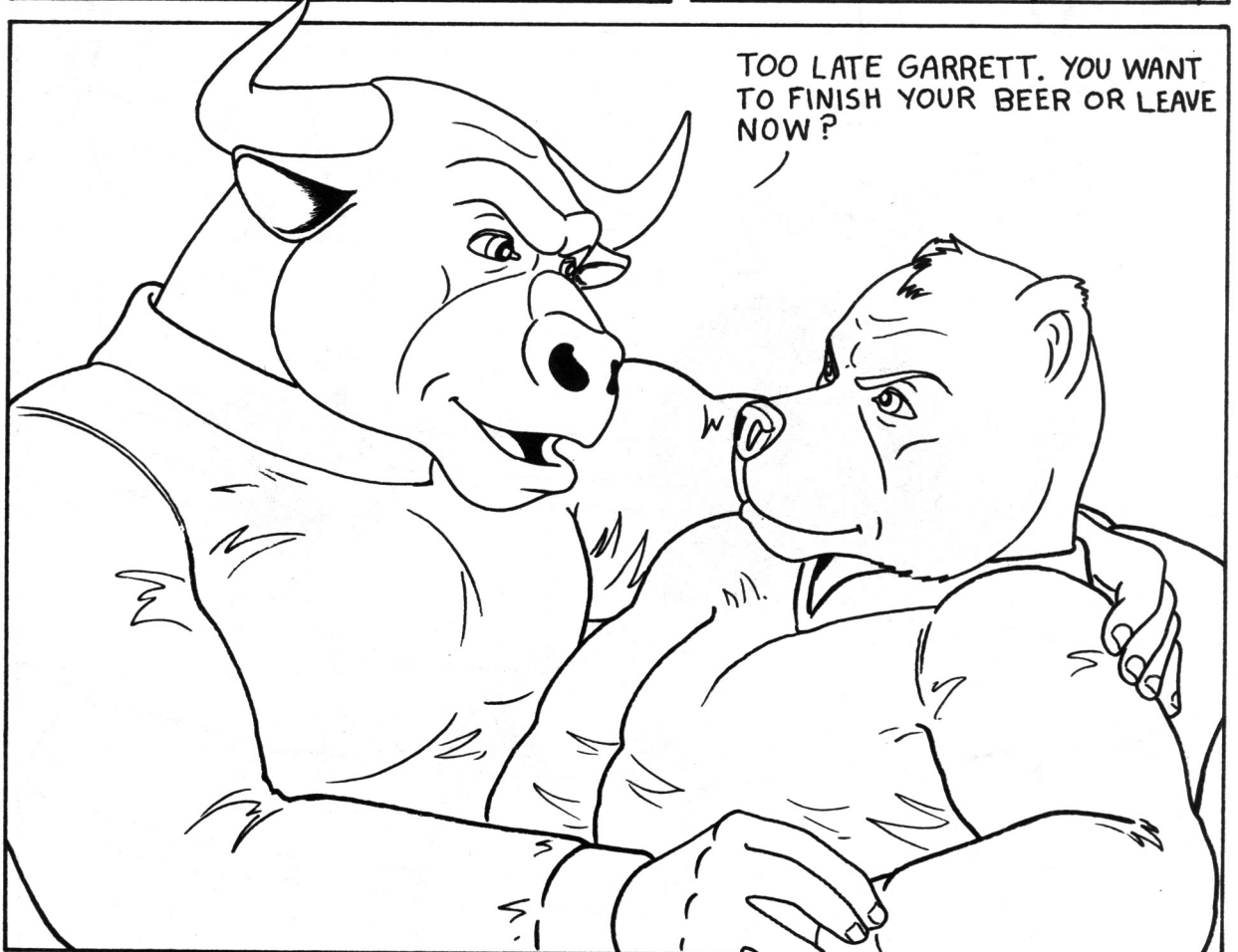




I'M WITH HIM ?

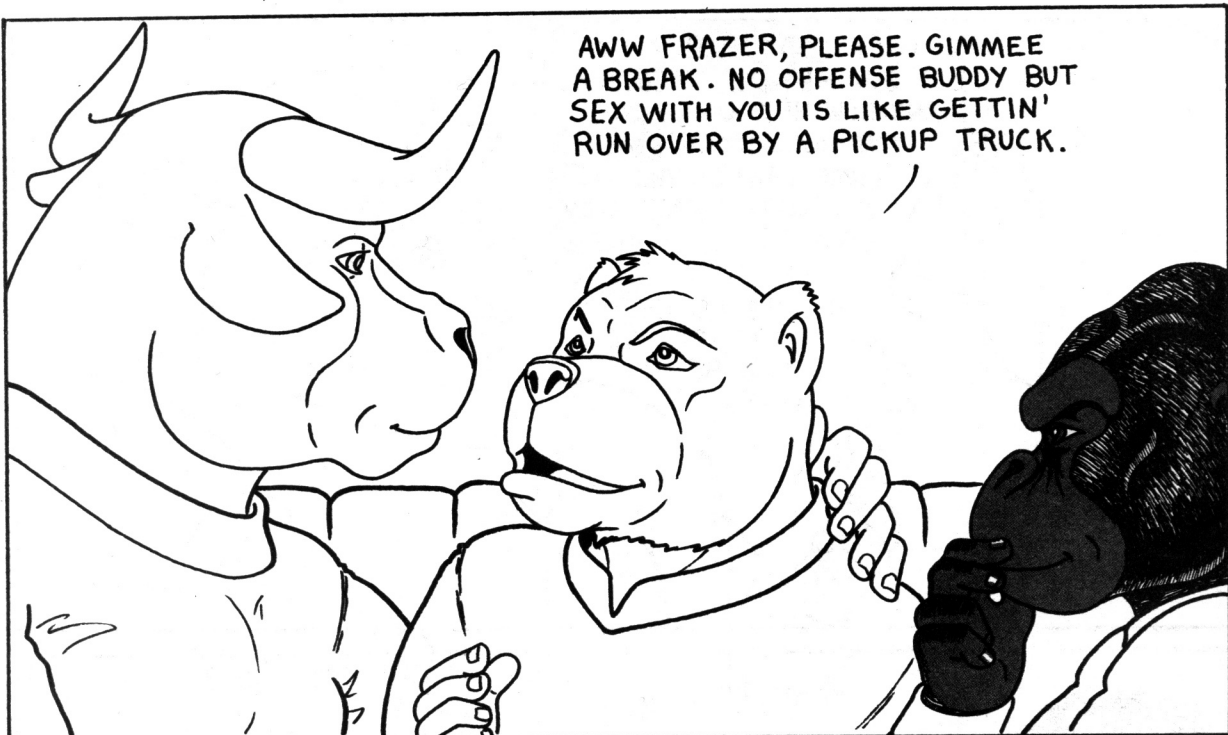


UHH, I'M WITH THEM



TOO LATE GARRETT. YOU WANT  
TO FINISH YOUR BEER OR LEAVE  
NOW ?

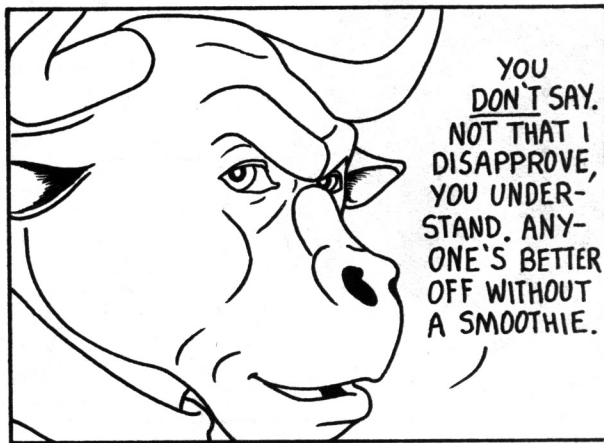




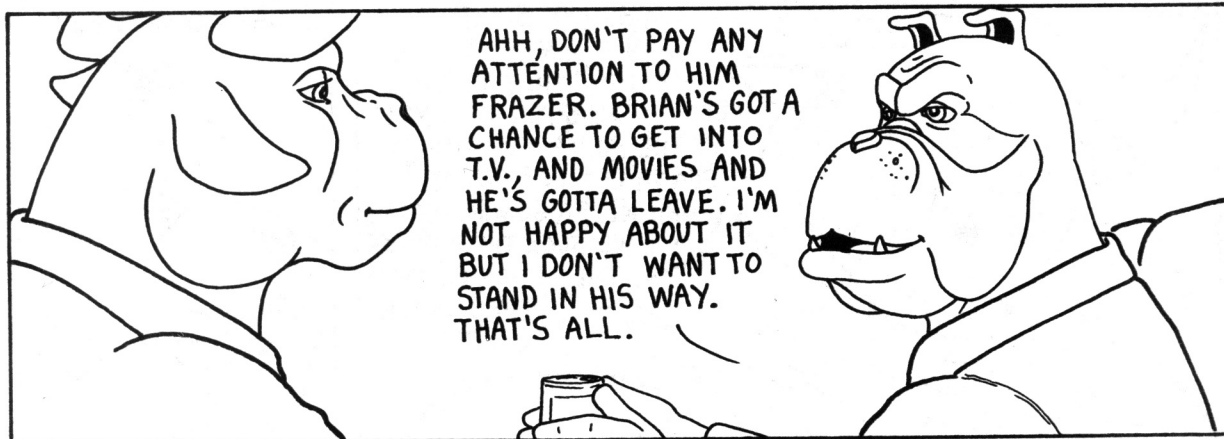
AWW FRAZER, PLEASE. GIMMEE  
A BREAK. NO OFFENSE BUDDY BUT  
SEX WITH YOU IS LIKE GETTIN'  
RUN OVER BY A PICKUP TRUCK.



BESIDES, SPIKE'S  
LOVER IS SPLITTING  
ON HIM AND  
WE'RE TRYING  
TO CHEER HIM  
UP. RIGHT  
SPIKE?



YOU  
DON'T SAY.  
NOT THAT I  
DISAPPROVE,  
YOU UNDER-  
STAND. ANY-  
ONE'S BETTER  
OFF WITHOUT  
A SMOOTHIE.



AHH, DON'T PAY ANY  
ATTENTION TO HIM  
FRAZER. BRIAN'S GOT A  
CHANCE TO GET INTO  
T.V., AND MOVIES AND  
HE'S GOTTA LEAVE. I'M  
NOT HAPPY ABOUT IT  
BUT I DON'T WANT TO  
STAND IN HIS WAY.  
THAT'S ALL.





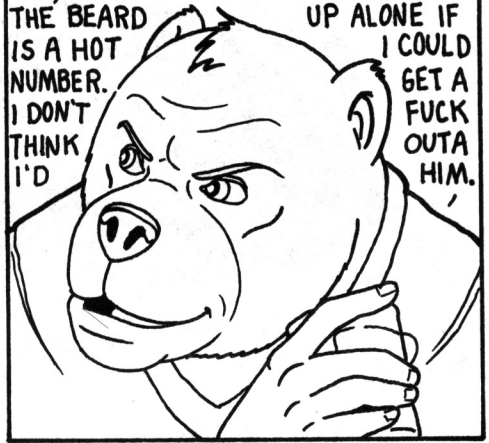
THOSE CUTIES ARE EITHER  
LOST OR  
PICKINGS  
MUST BE

PRETTY SLIM OUT  
THERE  
TONIGHT.



BOY, THAT GUY WITH  
THE BEARD  
IS A HOT  
NUMBER.  
I DON'T  
THINK  
I'D

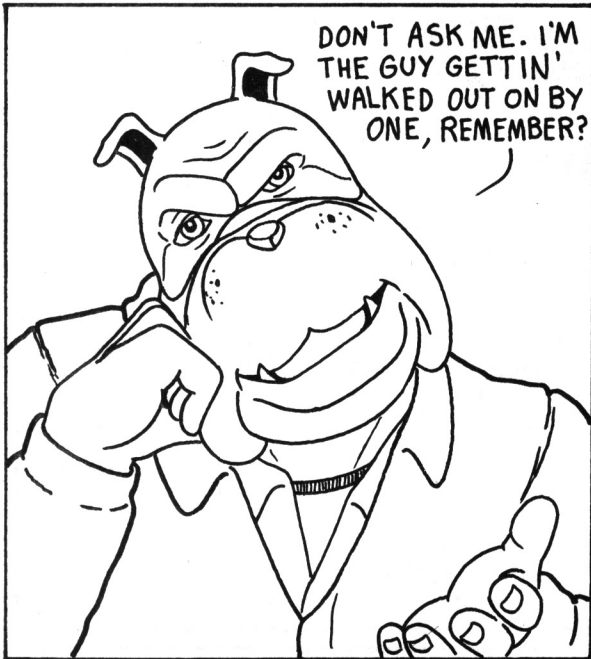
MIND WAKING  
UP ALONE IF  
I COULD  
GET A  
FUCK  
OUTA  
HIM.



GUYS, LOOK AT THIS. CAN YOU TELL ME WHY THIS  
MAN WANTS TO PASS UP A SURE THING SITTING  
RIGHT BESIDE HIM TO  
GO TAKE HIS CHANCES  
WITH A SMOOTHIE WHO  
PROBABLY BEATS OFF ON  
HIS TEDDY BEAR?







DON'T ASK ME. I'M  
THE GUY GETTIN'  
WALKED OUT ON BY  
ONE, REMEMBER?



SO TELL THIS KNUCKELHEAD TO STOP  
WASTING HIS TIME.  
NO  
SMOOTHIE  
IS GONNA  
GIVE HIM  
DEACENT SEX  
— ANYWAY,  
RIGHT?



WELL, SPIKE, I THINK  
WE'VE HAD ENOUGH FUN  
FOR TONIGHT. WE  
BETTER GET GOIN'.



HEY, C'MON YOU TWO.  
HELP ME PERSUADE  
THIS GUY THAT I'M THE  
BEST MAN  
IN THE BAR.



SORRY FRAZER.  
YER ON YER OWN.  
GOOD LUCK  
GARRETT.

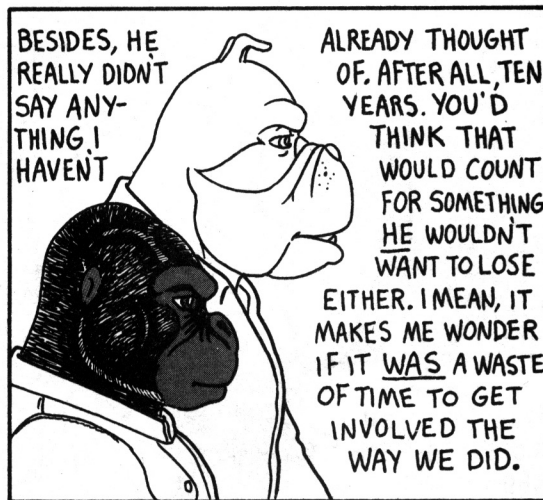


HOOO, JEEZ, WHAT A DISASTER. SPIKE, HONESTLY, I THOUGHT IT WAS GONNA BE NICE AND QUIET IN THERE.

THE LAST THING I EXPECTED WAS THAT BIGMOUTH FRAZER TO SHOW UP AND KICK YOU RIGHT IN THE BALLS.

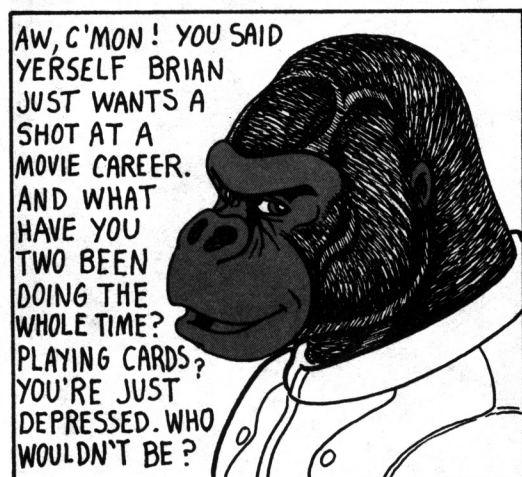


AWW, DON'T WORRY ABOUT THAT ADRIAN. HELL, IT'S NOT LIKE I'M CRYIN' INTO MY PILLOW OR ANYTHING. FRAZER ALWAYS SAYS THINGS LIKE THAT JUST TO SEE WHAT KIND OF REACTION HE CAN GET.



BESIDES, HE REALLY DIDN'T SAY ANYTHING. I HAVEN'T

ALREADY THOUGHT OF. AFTER ALL TEN YEARS. YOU'D THINK THAT WOULD COUNT FOR SOMETHING HE WOULDN'T WANT TO LOSE EITHER. I MEAN, IT MAKES ME WONDER IF IT WAS A WASTE OF TIME TO GET INVOLVED THE WAY WE DID.



AW, C'MON! YOU SAID YERSELF BRIAN JUST WANTS A SHOT AT A MOVIE CAREER. AND WHAT HAVE YOU TWO BEEN DOING THE WHOLE TIME? PLAYING CARDS? YOU'RE JUST DEPRESSED. WHO WOULDN'T BE?



YEAH, I KNOW. BUT, I DON'T MIND TELLING YOU, IT HURTS. IT HURTS LIKE HELL AND THERE'S NOTHING I CAN DO ABOUT IT.



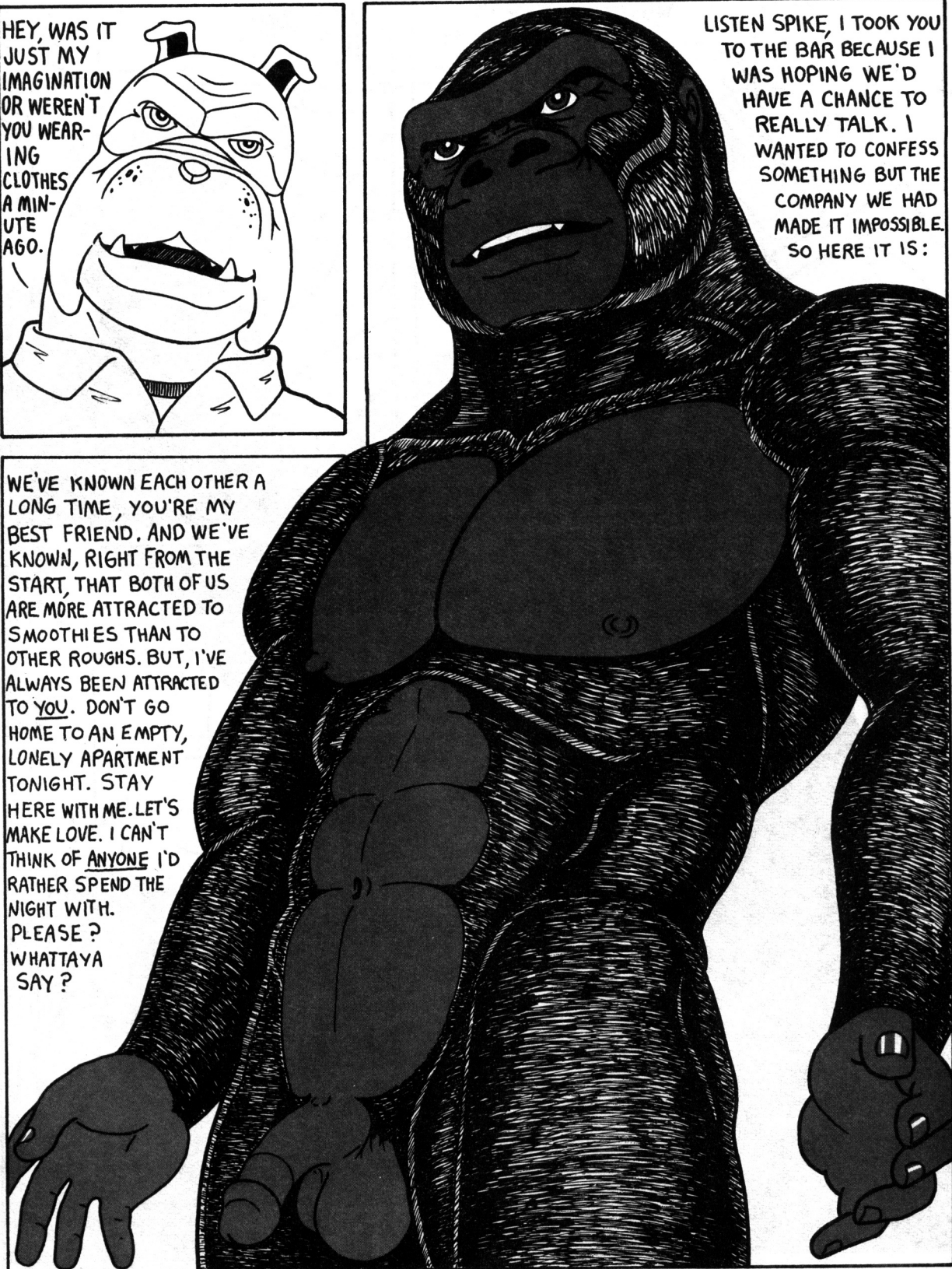


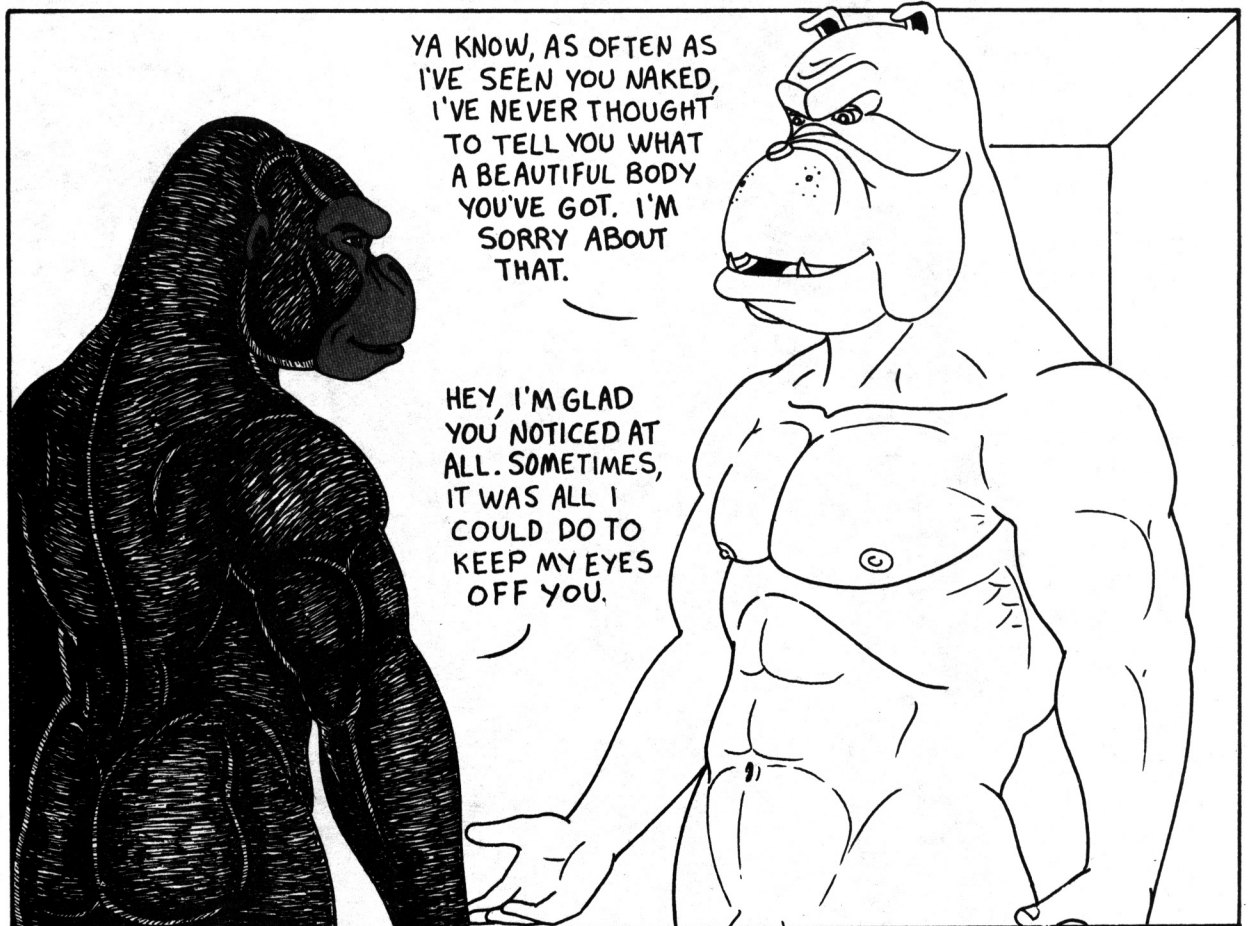
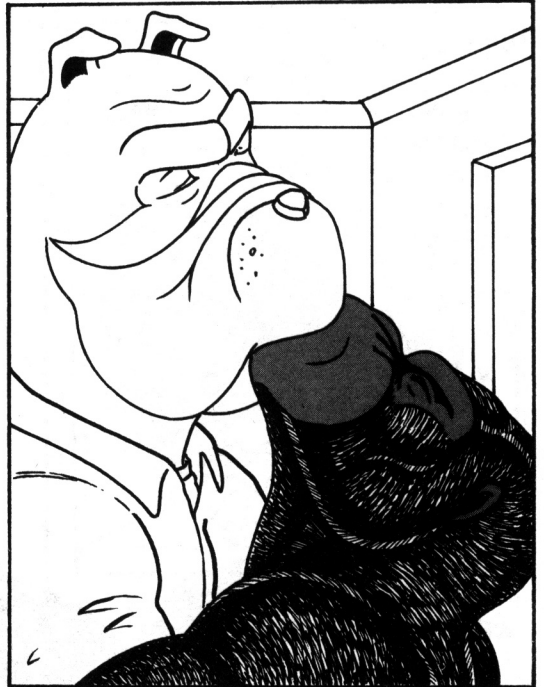
HEY, WAS IT  
JUST MY  
IMAGINATION  
OR WEREN'T  
YOU WEAR-  
ING  
CLOTHES  
A MIN-  
UTE  
AGO.




WE'VE KNOWN EACH OTHER A  
LONG TIME, YOU'RE MY  
BEST FRIEND. AND WE'VE  
KNOWN, RIGHT FROM THE  
START, THAT BOTH OF US  
ARE MORE ATTRACTED TO  
SMOOTHIES THAN TO  
OTHER ROUGHS. BUT, I'VE  
ALWAYS BEEN ATTRACTED  
TO YOU. DON'T GO  
HOME TO AN EMPTY,  
LONELY APARTMENT  
TONIGHT. STAY  
HERE WITH ME. LET'S  
MAKE LOVE. I CAN'T  
THINK OF ANYONE I'D  
RATHER SPEND THE  
NIGHT WITH.  
PLEASE?  
WHATTAYA  
SAY?

LISTEN SPIKE, I TOOK YOU  
TO THE BAR BECAUSE I  
WAS HOPING WE'D  
HAVE A CHANCE TO  
REALLY TALK. I  
WANTED TO CONFESS  
SOMETHING BUT THE  
COMPANY WE HAD  
MADE IT IMPOSSIBLE.  
SO HERE IT IS:



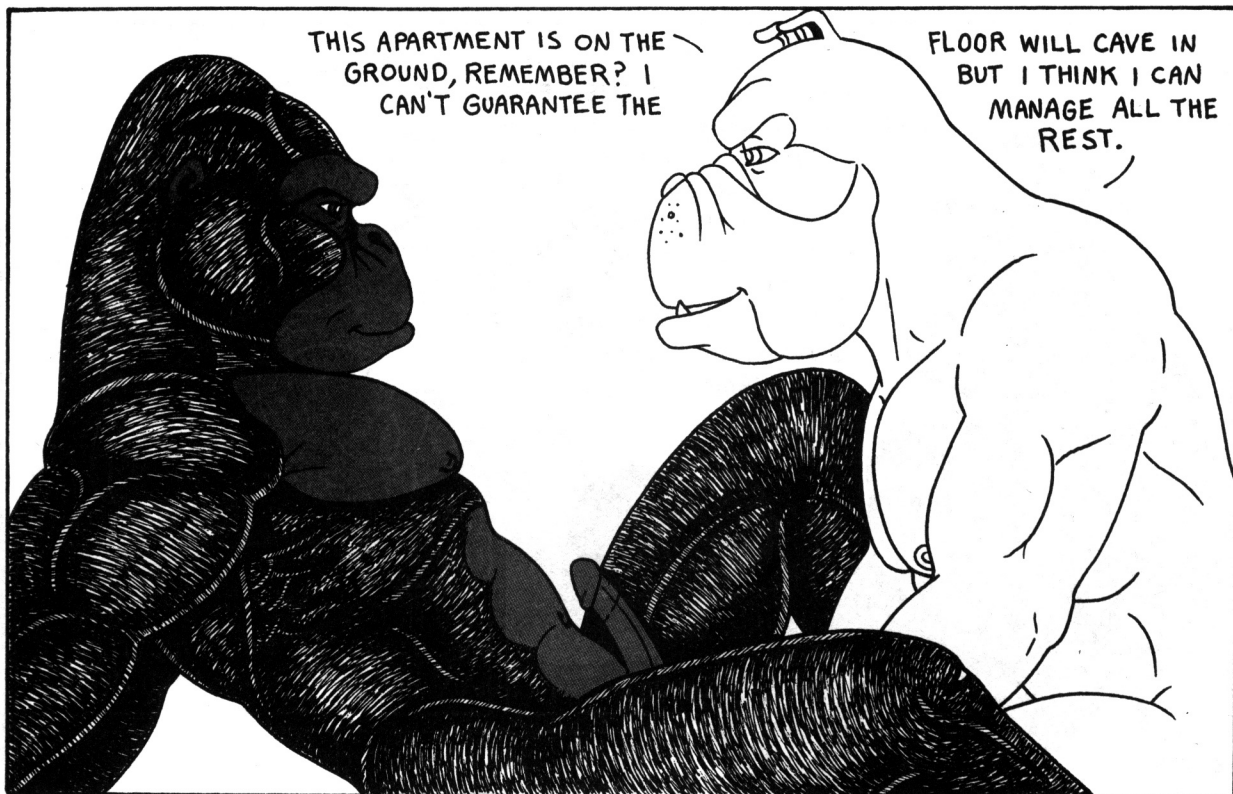




FEELS KINDA STRANGE ALL OF A  
SUDDEN. HERE WE'VE BEEN FRIENDS  
FOR SUCH A LONG TIME AND NOW  
THAT WE'RE IN BED I REALIZE  
I DON'T KNOW ANYTHING  
ABOUT YOU. HAVEN'T WE  
EVER TALKED ABOUT SEX?  
WHAT DO YOU LIKE TO DO?  
C'MON, I'M OPEN FOR  
ANYTHING YOU WANT.  
YOU NAME IT.

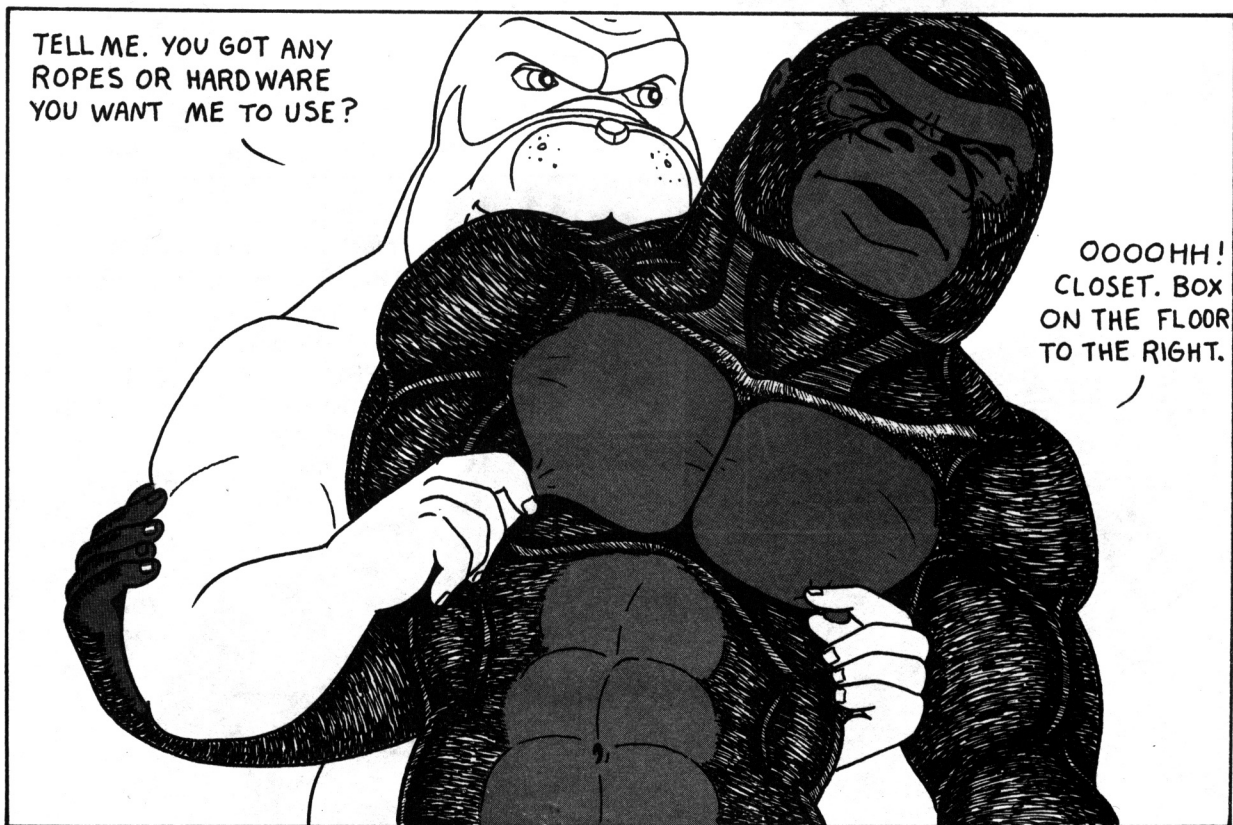


WELL, ..... I'VE HAD THIS  
FANTASY: I'M TIED UP AND  
THIS BIG BULLDOG FACED  
GUY, WHO REALLY KNOWS  
HOW TO WORK A GUYS  
NIPPLES, PUTS MY TITS  
THROUGH THE MEATGRINDER.  
THEN, HE FUCKS ME SO  
HARD THE BED  
COLLAPSES AND THE  
FLOOR CAVES  
IN. THINK  
YOU CAN  
HANDLE  
THAT?



THIS APARTMENT IS ON THE  
GROUND, REMEMBER? I  
CAN'T GUARANTEE THE

FLOOR WILL CAVE IN  
BUT I THINK I CAN  
MANAGE ALL THE  
REST.



TELL ME. YOU GOT ANY  
ROPES OR HARDWARE  
YOU WANT ME TO USE?

OOOOHH!  
CLOSET. BOX  
ON THE FLOOR  
TO THE RIGHT.



WOW. THIS STUFF  
LOOKS PRETTY  
HEAVY DUTY  
PAL.

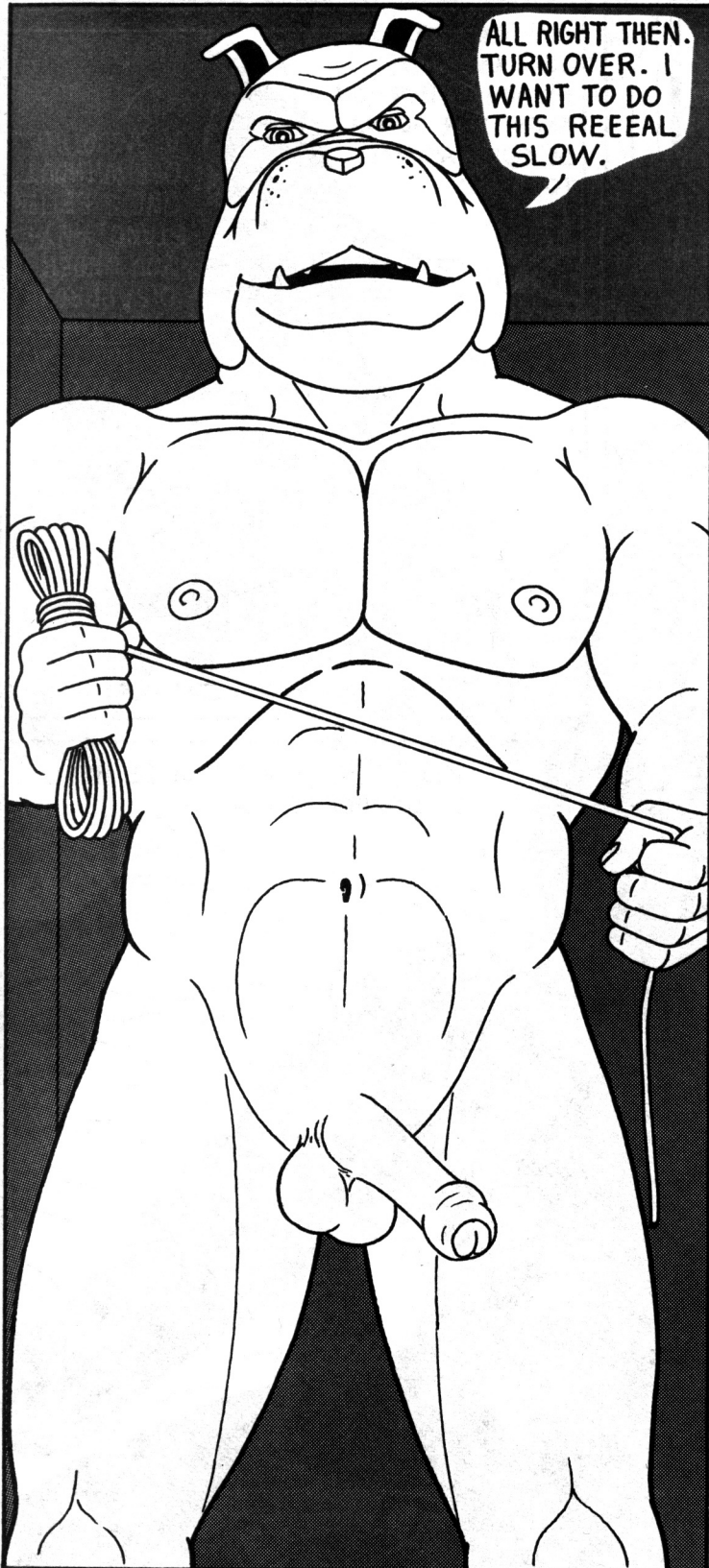


YOU SURE THIS IS WHAT  
YOU WANT, TIGER?  
I'LL DO IT BUT YOU  
KNOW YER GONNA  
BE SORE AS HELL  
TOMORROW.



MISTER, IF I'M NOT, I'LL BE REAL  
DISSAPPOINTED IN YOU.

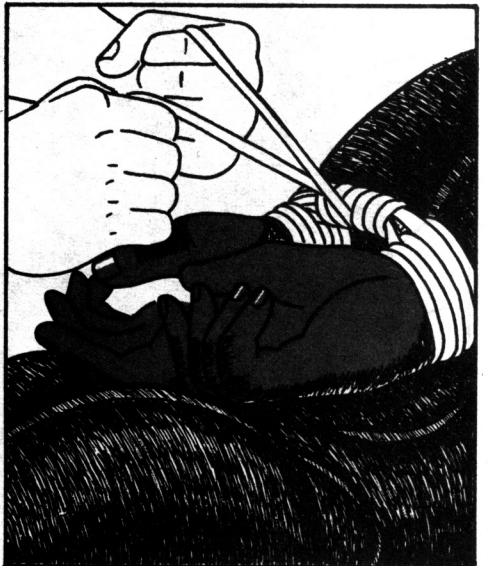


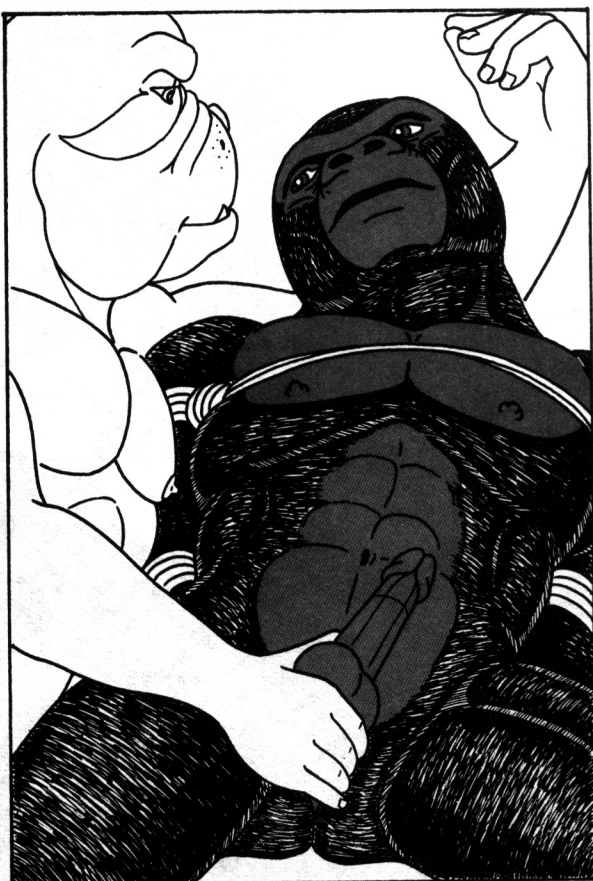
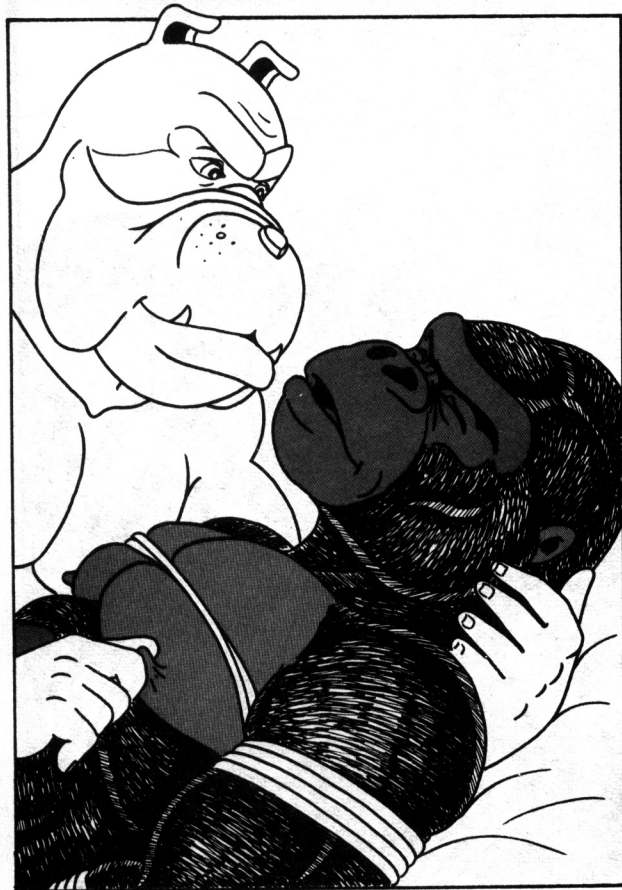
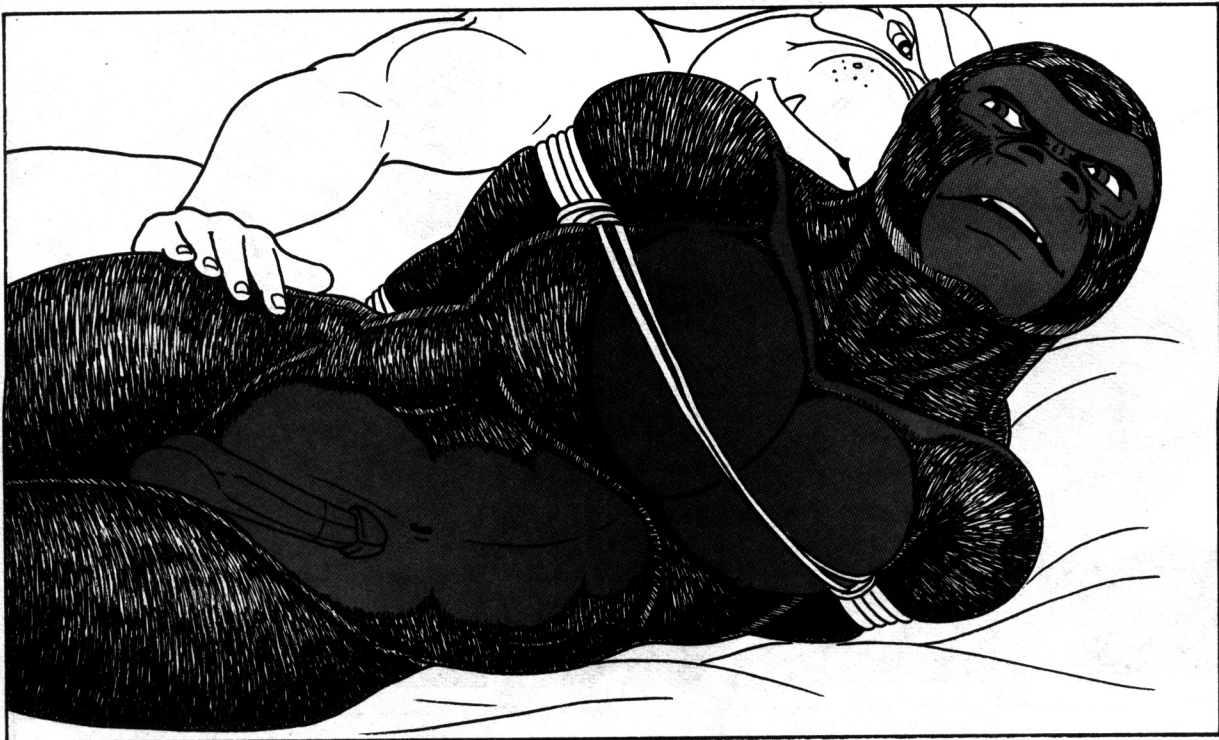


ALL RIGHT THEN.  
TURN OVER. I  
WANT TO DO  
THIS REEAL  
SLOW.

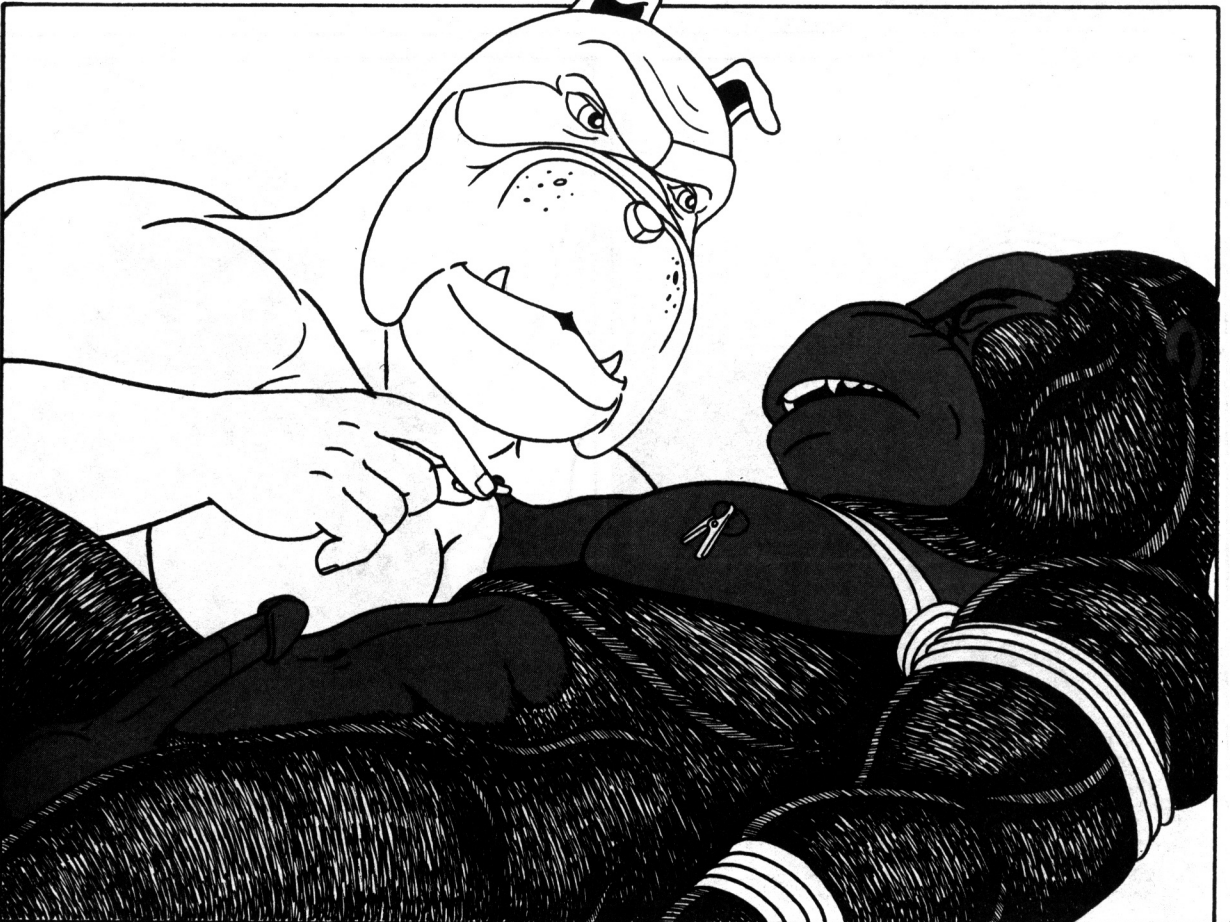
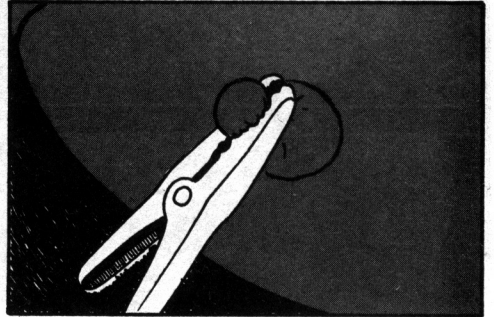
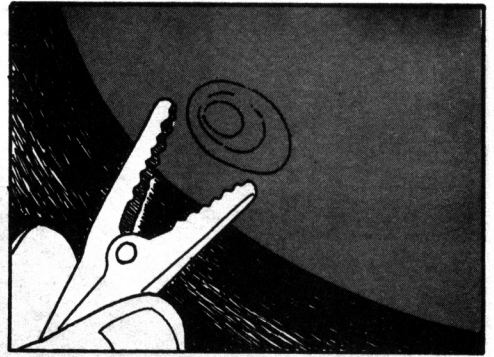
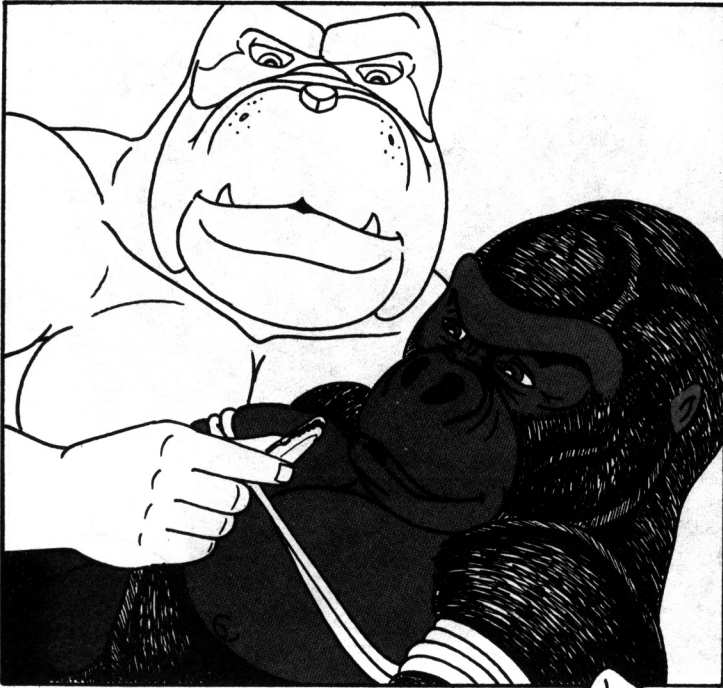


O.K., NOW.  
GIMMEE  
YOUR HANDS.

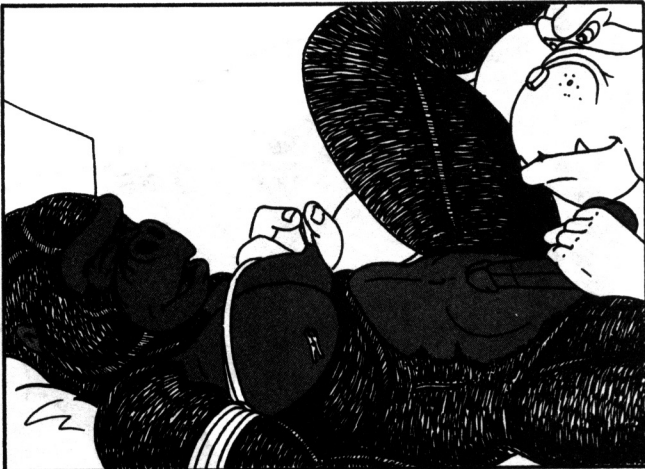


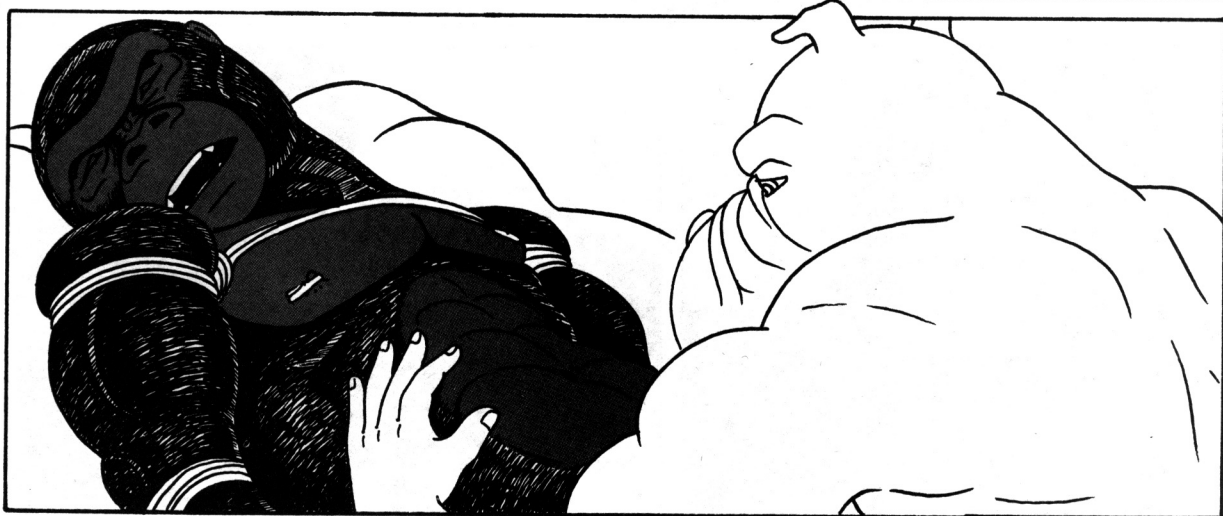
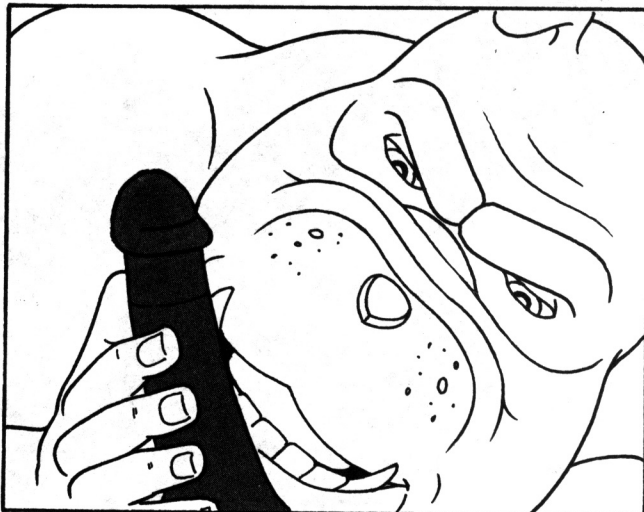
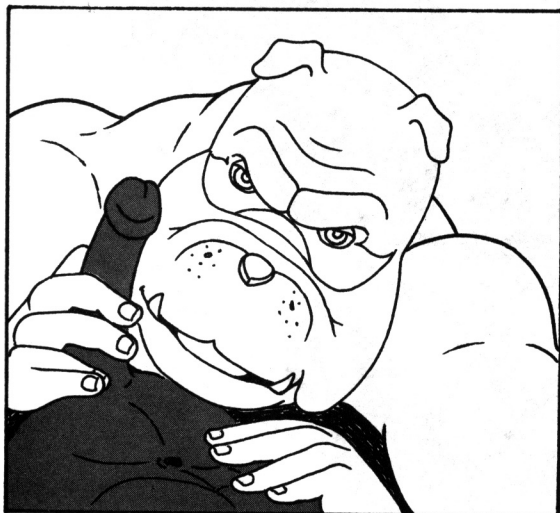
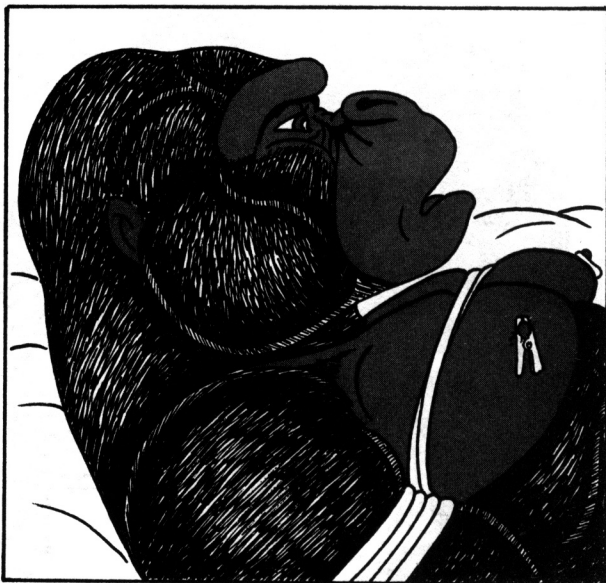
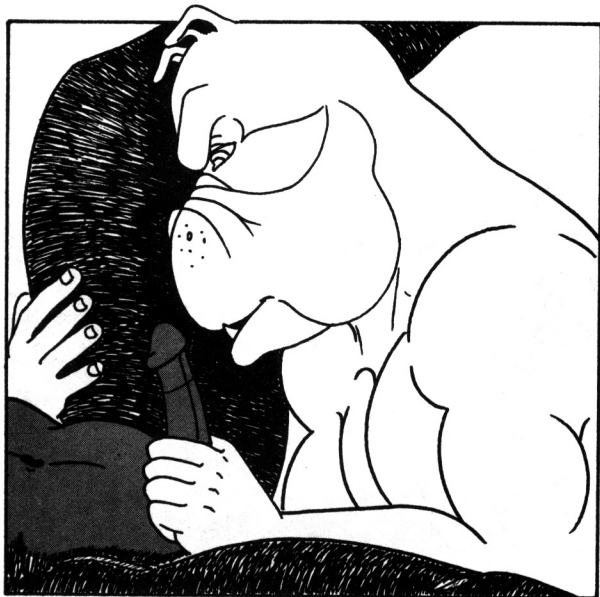


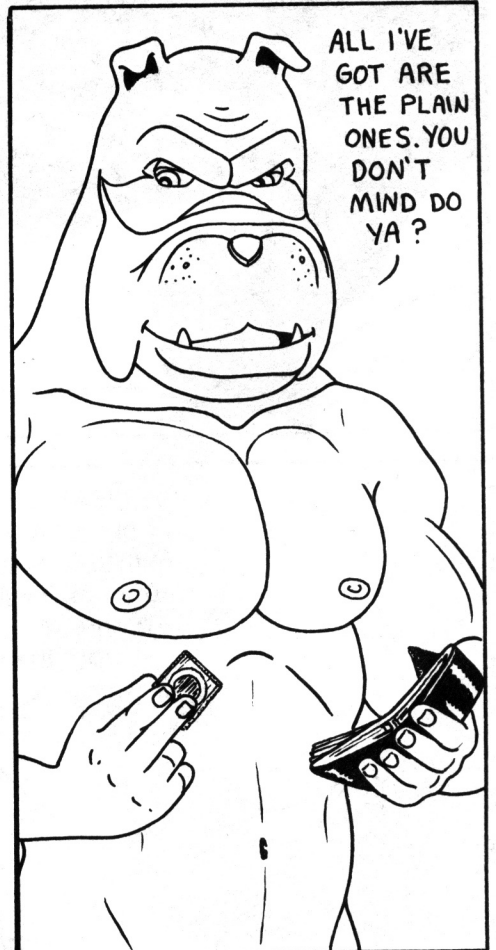
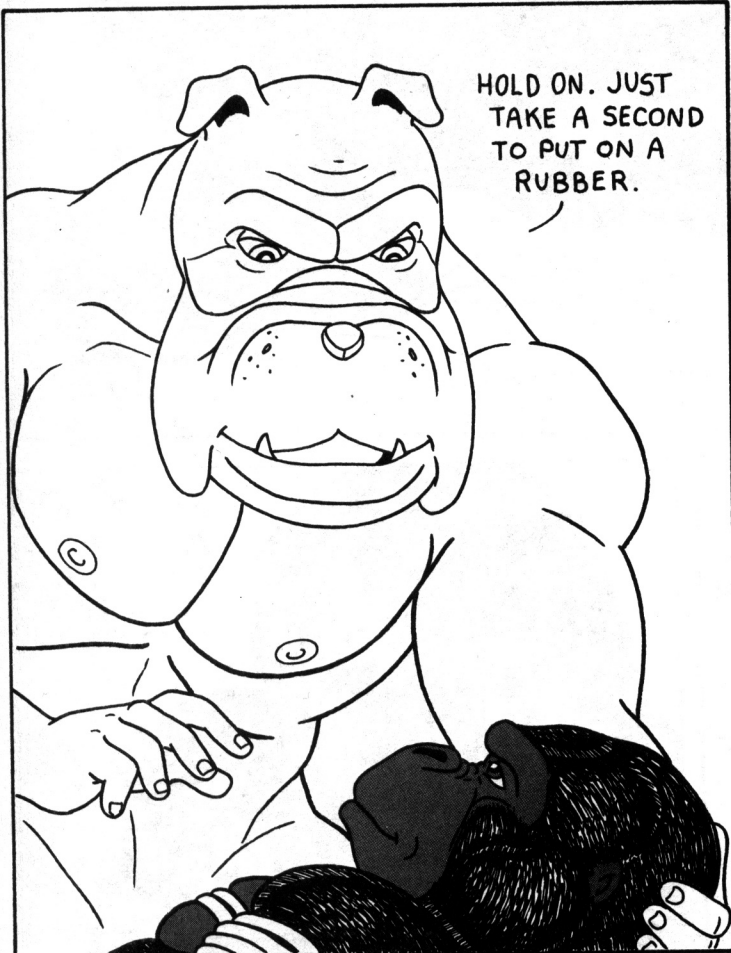
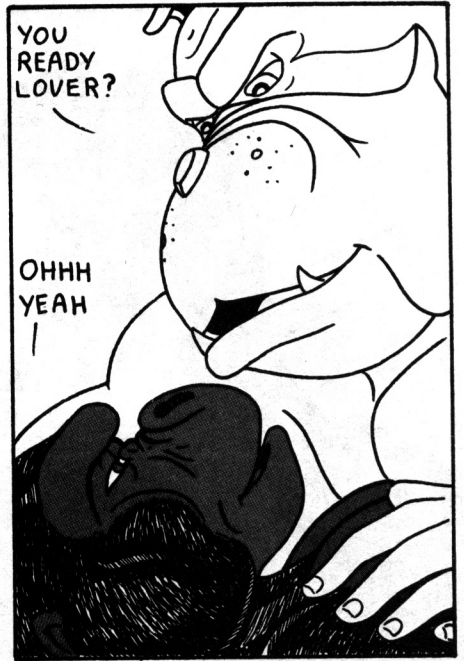










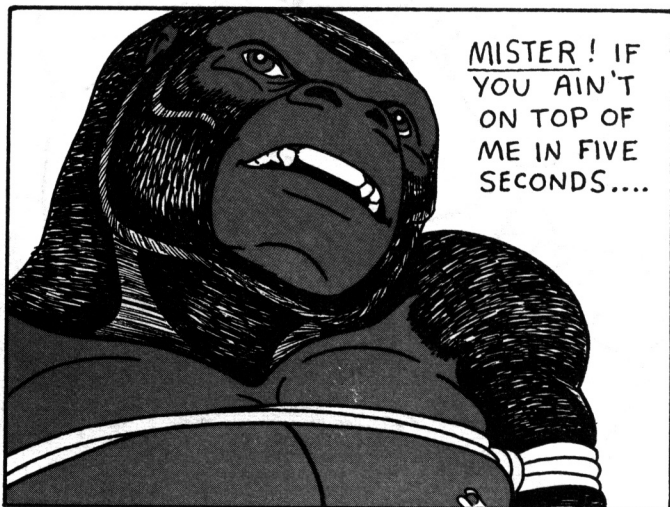




MIND?! DO I LOOK LIKE I MIND?  
YA KNOW, IF YER DOIN' THIS TO  
DRIVE ME CRAZY, IT'S WORKING  
GREAT !



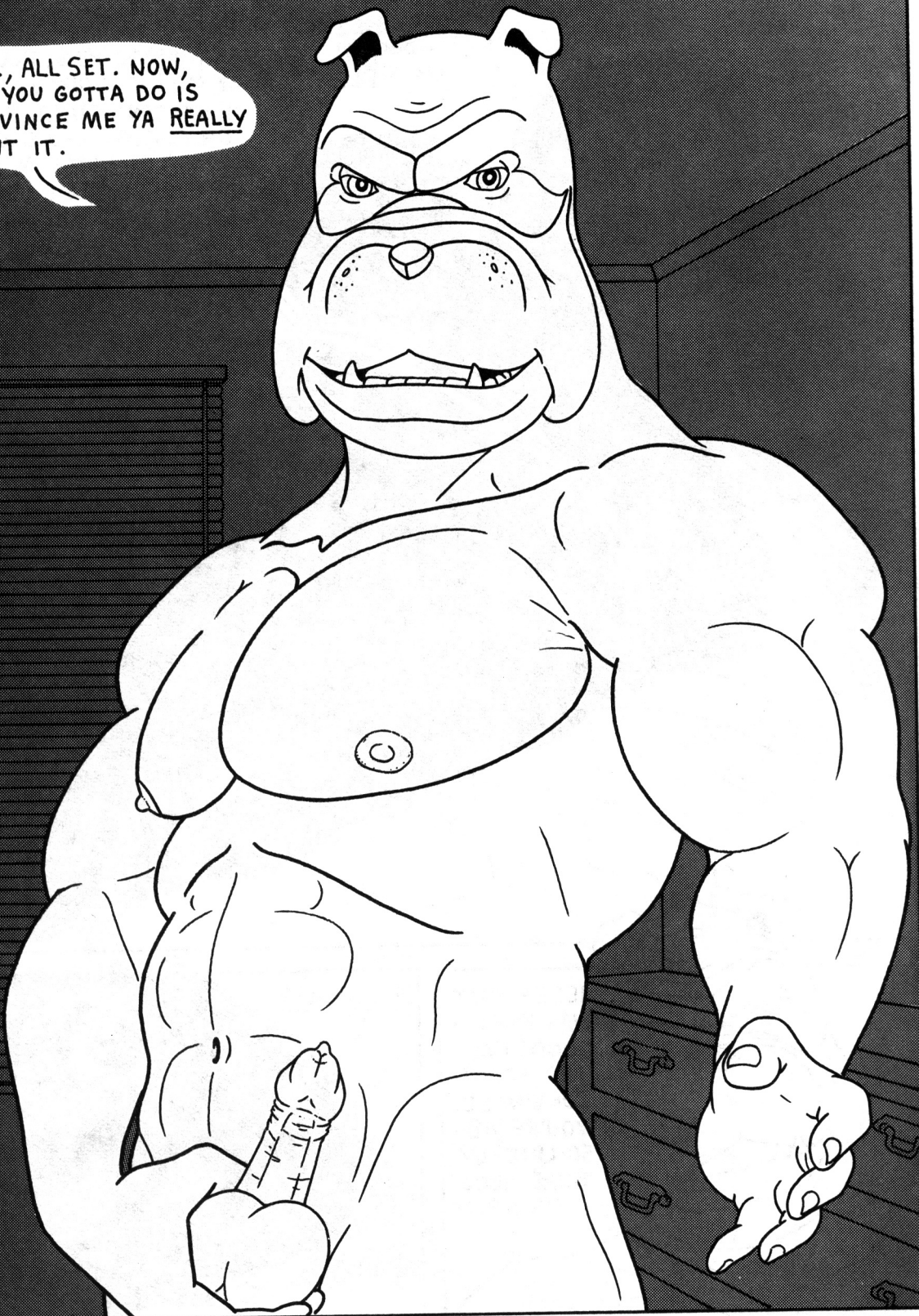
OH YEAH? WELL,  
I COULD TAKE  
ANOTHER HALF  
HOUR AND MAKE  
IT WORSE IF  
YOU LIKE.

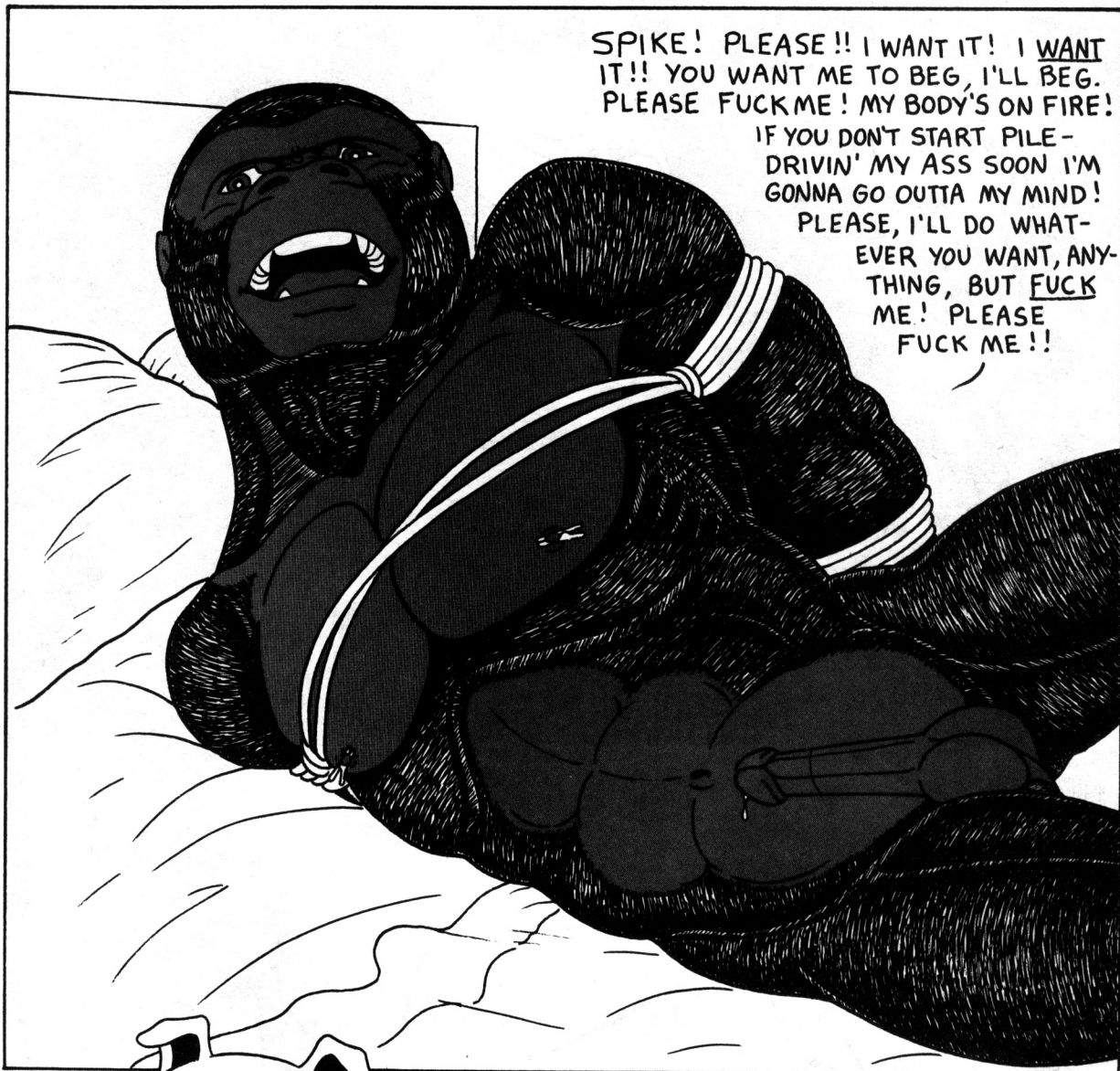


MISTER ! IF  
YOU AIN'T  
ON TOP OF  
ME IN FIVE  
SECONDS....



O.K., ALL SET. NOW,  
ALL YOU GOTTA DO IS  
CONVINCE ME YA REALLY  
WANT IT.





SPIKE! PLEASE!! I WANT IT! I WANT  
IT!! YOU WANT ME TO BEG, I'LL BEG.  
PLEASE FUCK ME! MY BODY'S ON FIRE!

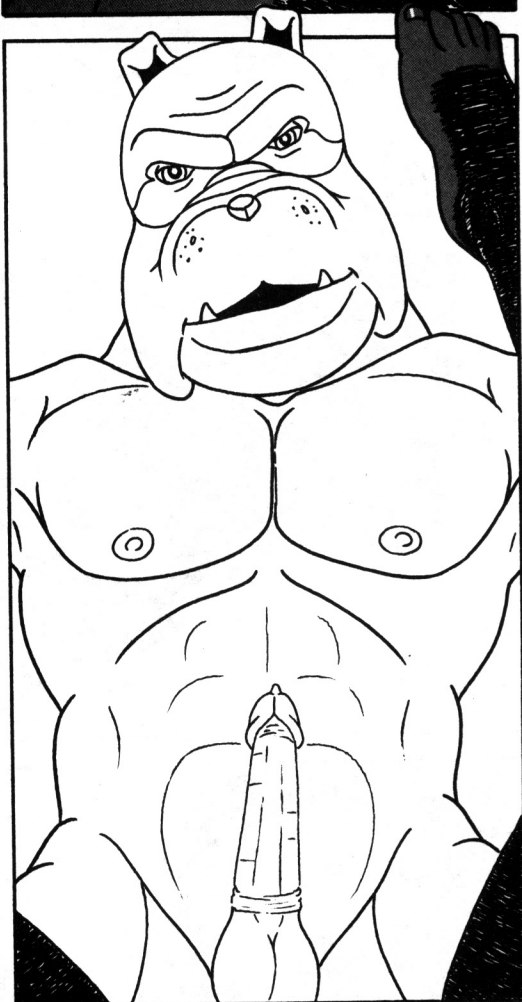
IF YOU DON'T START PILE-  
DRIVIN' MY ASS SOON I'M  
GONNA GO OUTTA MY MIND!  
PLEASE, I'LL DO WHAT-  
EVER YOU WANT, ANY-  
THING, BUT FUCK  
ME! PLEASE  
FUCK ME!!

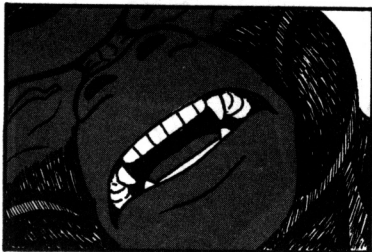


HEEEY. THAT  
WAS PRETTY  
GOOD. I'M  
JUST ABOUT  
CONVINCED.  
YOU'RE AB-  
SO-LUTE-LY  
SURE ABOUT  
THIS NOW?

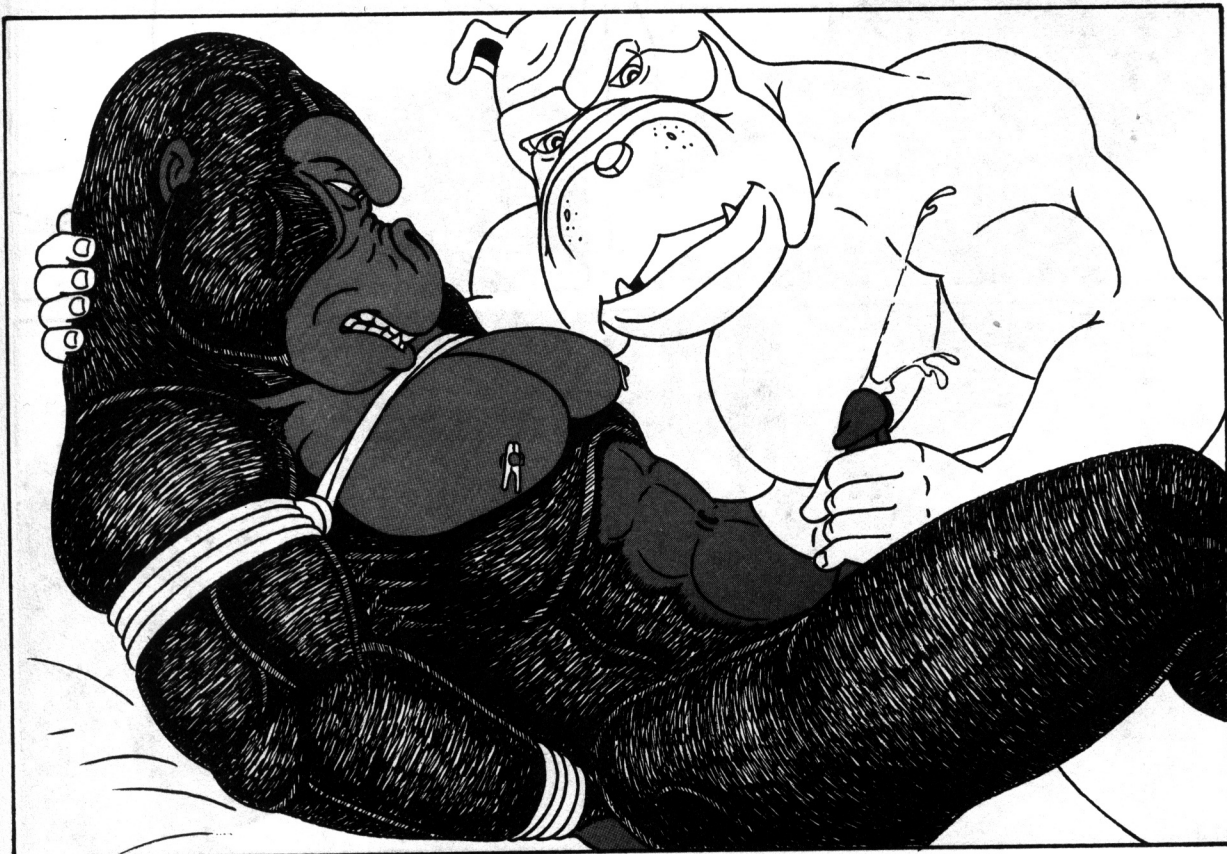
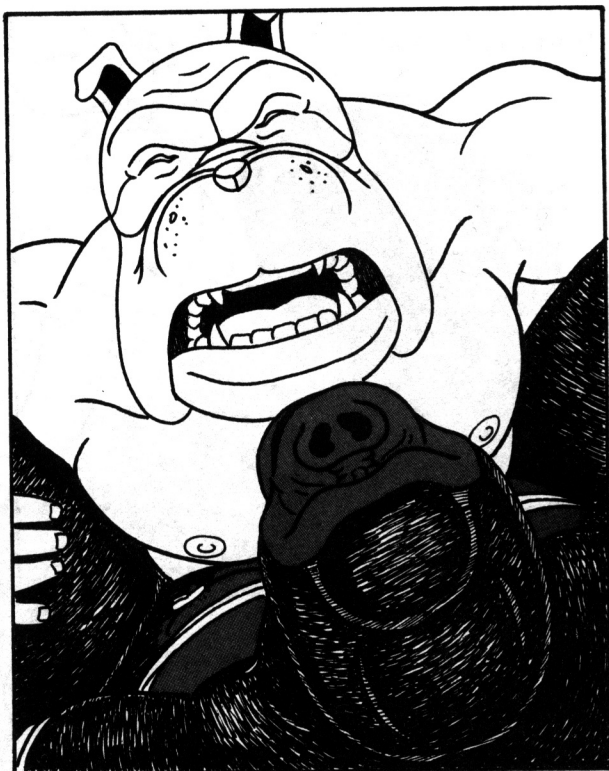


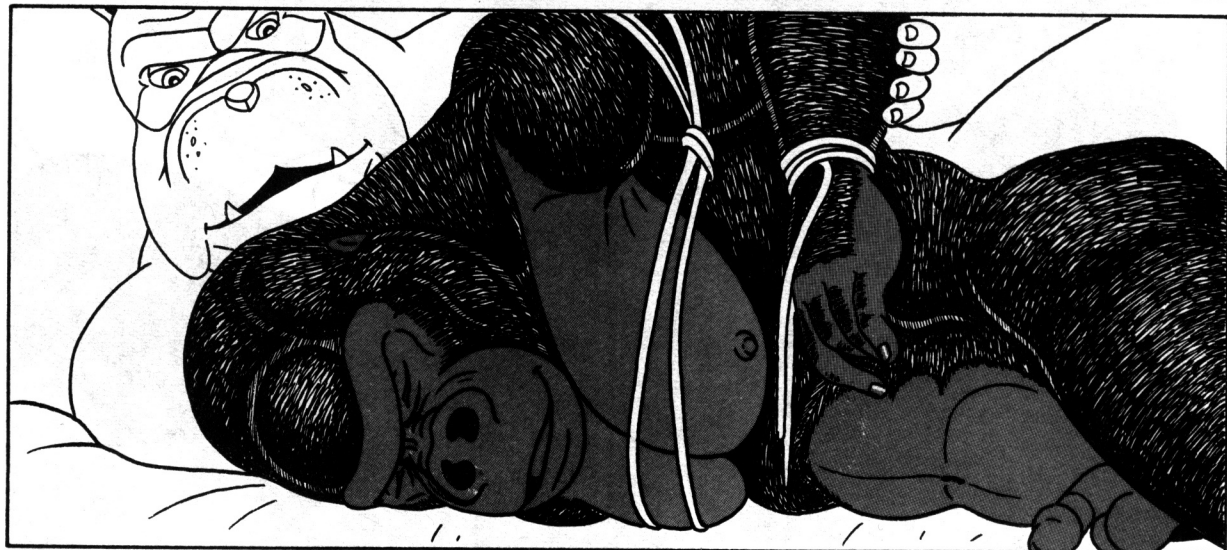
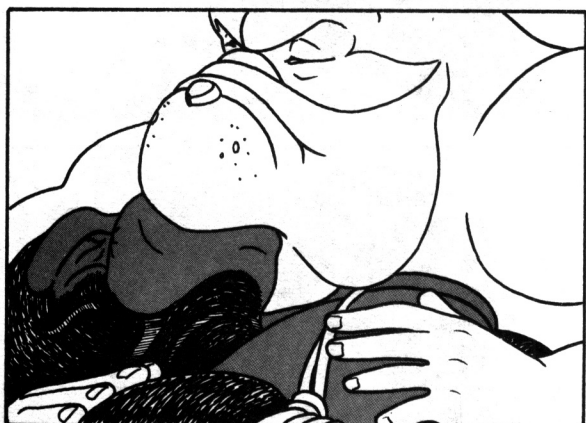
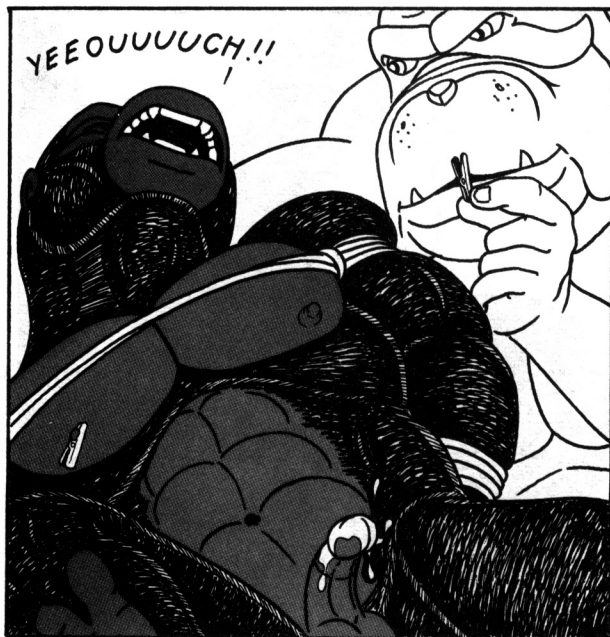
PLEEEEEASE.






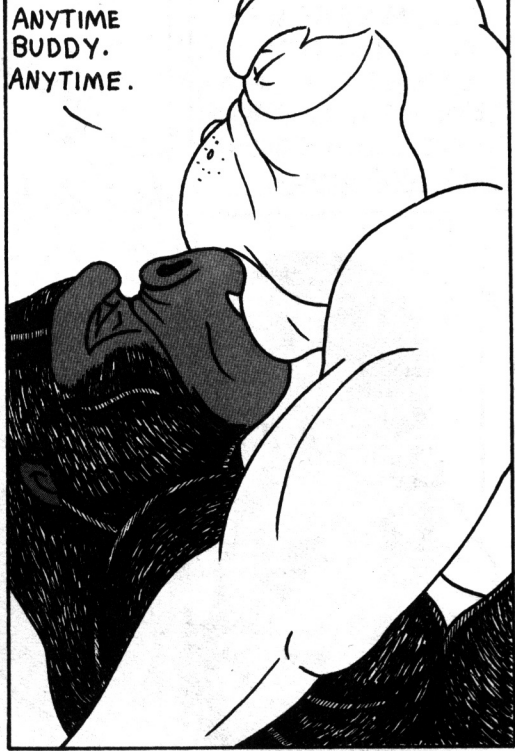









MAN, OH MAN. LOVER, IT'S BEEN A LOOONG TIME SINCE ANYONE'S DONE ME THAT GOOD. THANKS.



ANYTIME BUDDY. ANYTIME.



WHAT A WORKOUT! HOW'S THIS SOUND? LET'S GET A LITTLE SLEEP AND IN THE MORNING YOU CAN DO THE SAME THING TO ME.

OH GREAT! NOW HOW AM I SUPPOSED TO SLEEP THINKING ABOUT THAT?



WELL, MUCH AS WE'D  
LIKE TO RUN THROUGH  
THE WHOLE THING AGAIN,  
WE'VE GOT TO SKIP AHEAD  
TO THE SHOWER SCENE  
NEXT MORNING.



HEY! WHERE  
YA GOIN'?  
LET'S LATHER  
UP AND  
WRESTLE  
SOME  
MORE.



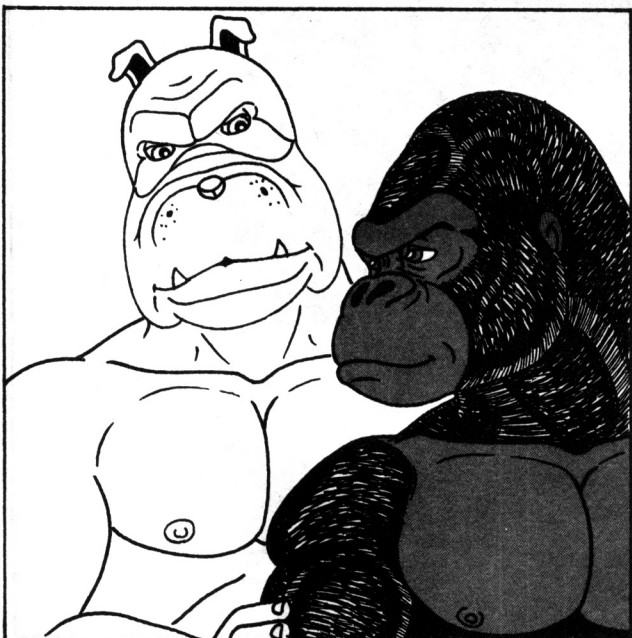
SPIKE, I CAN  
ONLY CUM SO  
MANY TIMES IN  
TWELVE HOURS. I'VE  
GOT AN IMPORTANT  
SIDE JOB LINED UP  
AND IT'S GOTTA GET  
DONE TODAY. BESIDES,  
I WAS HOPING YOU'D  
COME BACK TONIGHT.

I'LL SURE AS HELL  
TRY. I'M SUPPOSED  
TO MEET A FRIEND  
THIS MORNING  
BUT IT  
SHOULDN'T  
TAKE ALL  
DAY. WE  
GOT TIME  
FOR COFFEE  
BEFORE  
WE GO GET  
BREAKFAST?

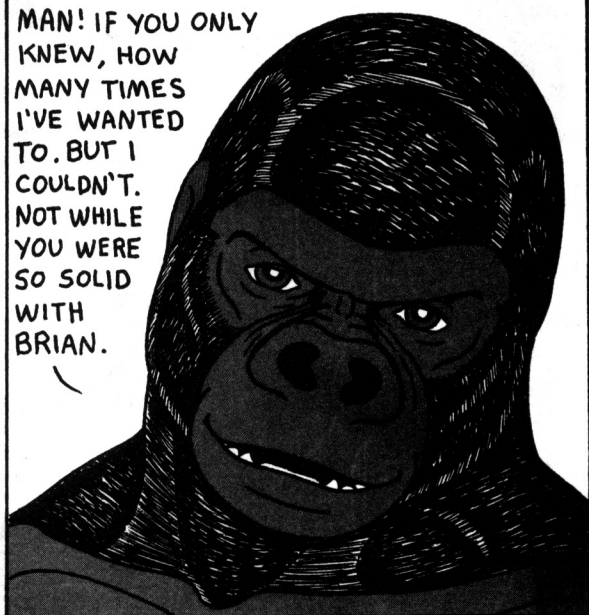


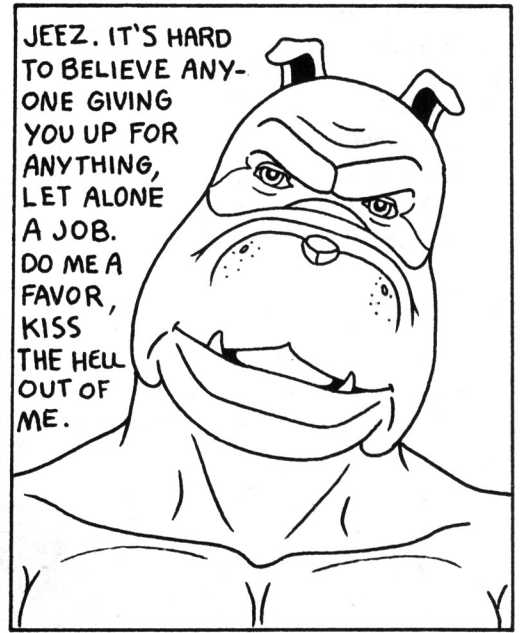
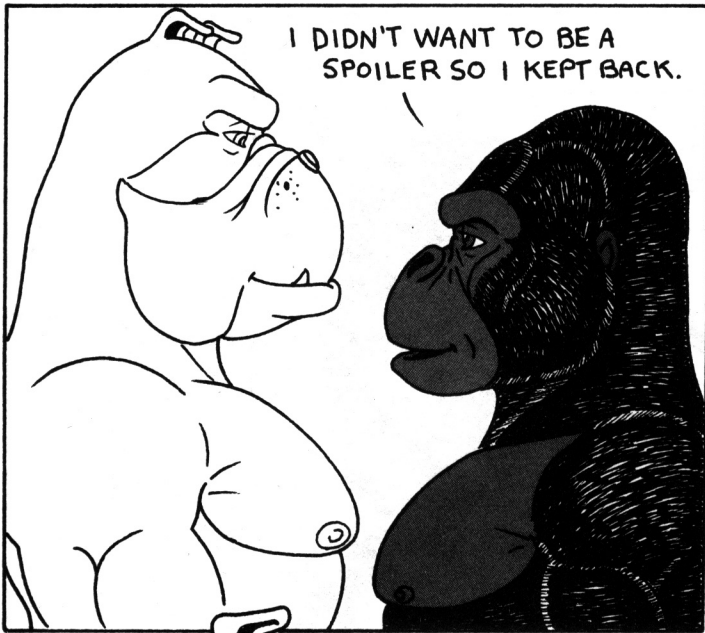


BUDDY, JUST  
OUT OF  
CURIOSITY,  
HOW COME  
YOU NEVER  
INVITED ME  
OVER HERE  
FOR THIS  
BEFORE?



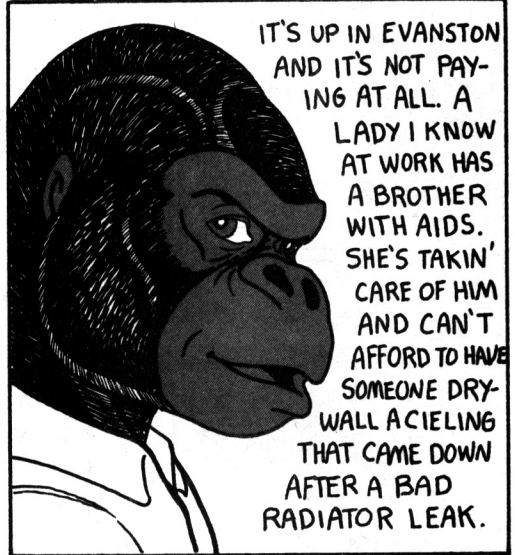
MAN! IF YOU ONLY  
KNEW, HOW  
MANY TIMES  
I'VE WANTED  
TO. BUT I  
COULDN'T.  
NOT WHILE  
YOU WERE  
SO SOLID  
WITH  
BRIAN.



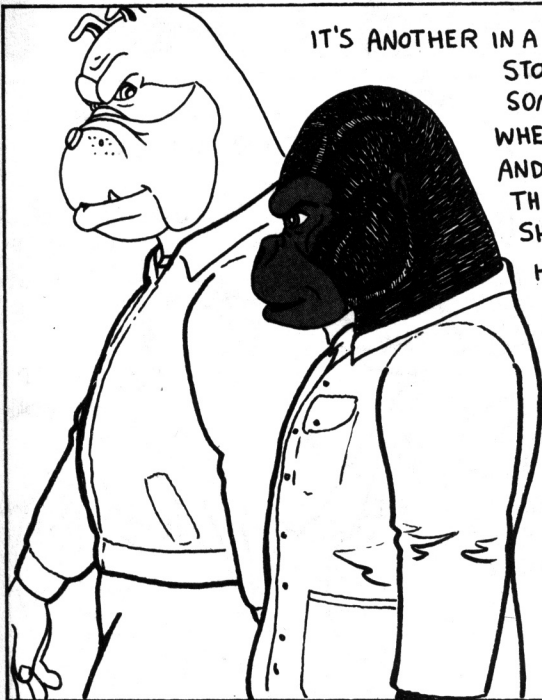




SO, WHERE'S THIS JOB AND  
ARE YA GONNA MAKE ANY-  
THING ON  
IT?



IT'S UP IN EVANSTON  
AND IT'S NOT PAY-  
ING AT ALL. A  
LADY I KNOW  
AT WORK HAS  
A BROTHER  
WITH AIDS.  
SHE'S TAKIN'  
CARE OF HIM  
AND CAN'T  
AFFORD TO HAVE  
SOMEONE DRY-  
WALL A CIELING  
THAT CAME DOWN  
AFTER A BAD  
RADIATOR LEAK.



IT'S ANOTHER IN A LONG LINE OF FUCK  
STORIES. SHE TRIED CALLING  
SOME CONTRACTORS BUT  
WHEN THEY SAW HER BROTHER  
AND THE HOSPITAL EQUIPMENT  
THEY JUST WALKED OUT.  
SHE HAD TO SHUT DOWN THE  
HEAT FOR THREE DAYS  
BEFORE A NEIGHBOR,  
WHO'S A PLUMBER, FIXED  
THE PIPE. BUT, SHE  
STILL COULDN'T GET  
ANYONE TO REPAIR  
THE HOLE IN THE  
CIELING. I VOLENTEERED  
AND STARTED IT THREE  
WEEKS AGO BUT THEN  
HAD TO WORK TWO  
WEEKENDS. I'M GONNA  
TRY TO FINISH  
TODAY.



YOU KNOW, IT'S REALLY  
STRANGE, AFTER ALL  
THE YEARS WE'VE BEEN  
FIGHTING WITH AND LEARN-  
ING ABOUT AIDS, THERE'R  
STILL SO MANY "SUPPOSED-  
TO-BE-TOUGHGUYS" WHO  
WONT DARE GO WHERE SOME-  
ONE IS SICK FROM IT.



THEN, IN COMES THIS  
ULTRA- STRAIGHT  
BLUE COLLAR  
PLUMBER WHO  
ACTS LIKE  
ABSOLUTELY  
NOTHING'S

WRONG AND  
DOES THE  
JOB FOR  
FREE. GO  
FIGURE.



YEAH, I'VE SEEN  
THAT MYSELF.  
IT SOMETIMES  
MAKES ME  
THINK THIS  
IS ALL A  
TEST. SOME  
PEOPLE PASS,  
SOME FAIL.



THERE'S MY BOYS.  
ADRIAN! WHERE'VE  
YOU BEEN HIDING  
LATELY? COFFEE  
GUYS?



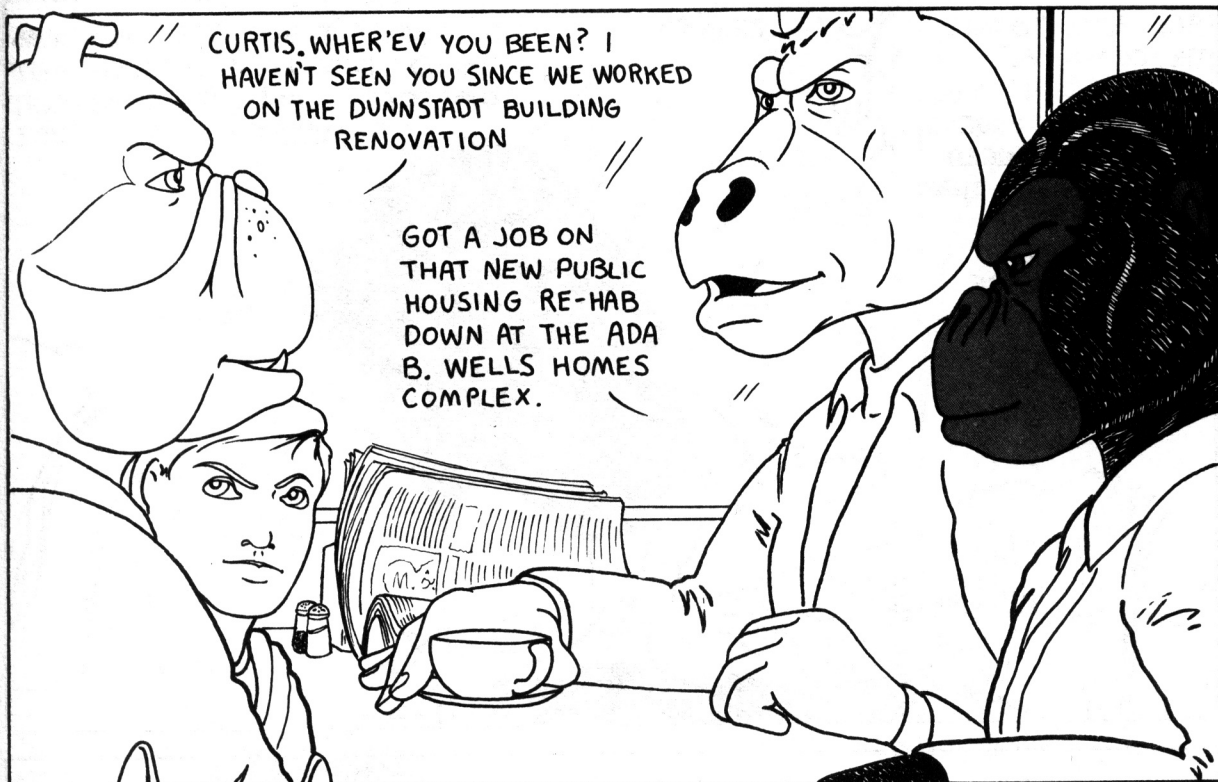
HI, SPIKE!  
DOWN HERE.



HI HAL. WHERE'D YOU  
FIND THIS GUY?

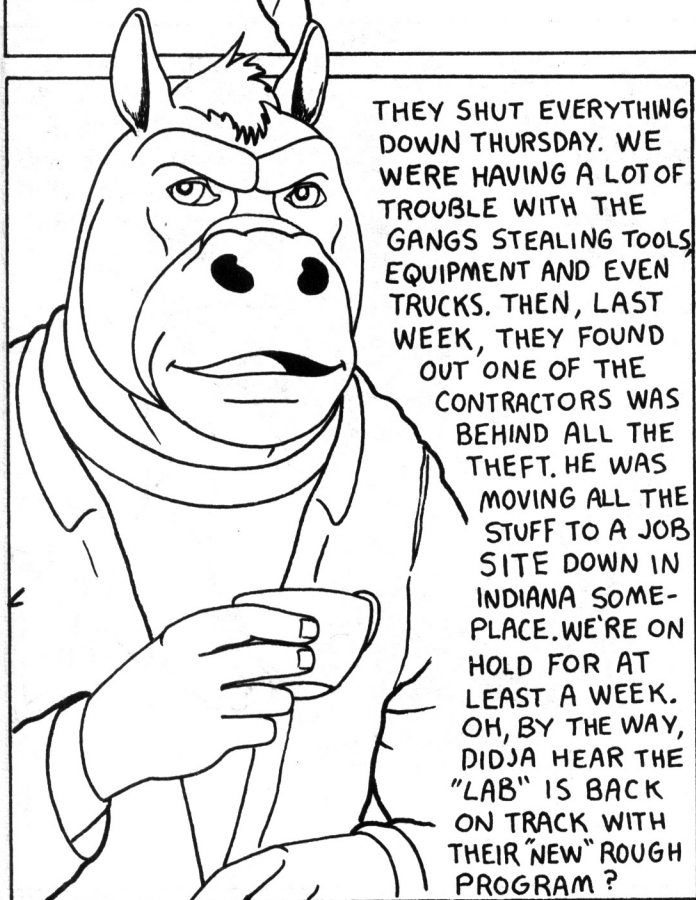
HE GOT OFF THE  
TRAIN AT  
GRAND AVE  
WITH ME  
SO I  
INVITED  
HIM ALONG



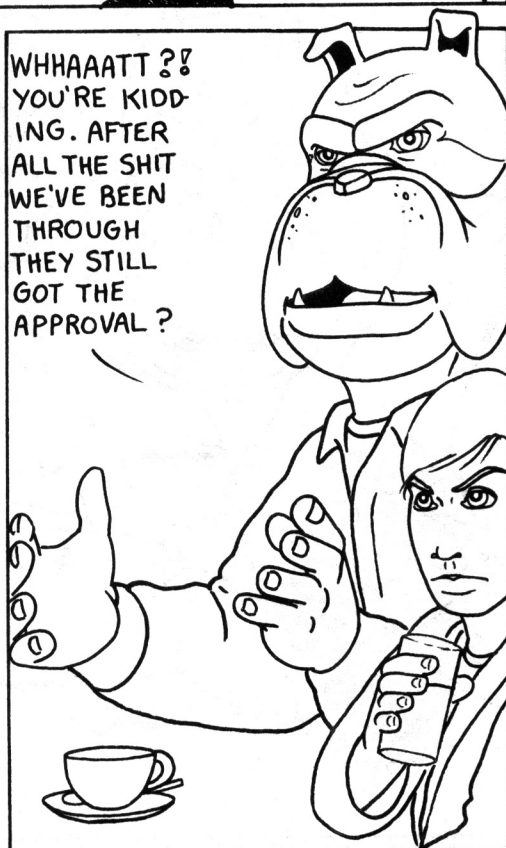


CURTIS, WHERE'VE YOU BEEN? I  
HAVEN'T SEEN YOU SINCE WE WORKED  
ON THE DUNNSTADT BUILDING  
RENOVATION

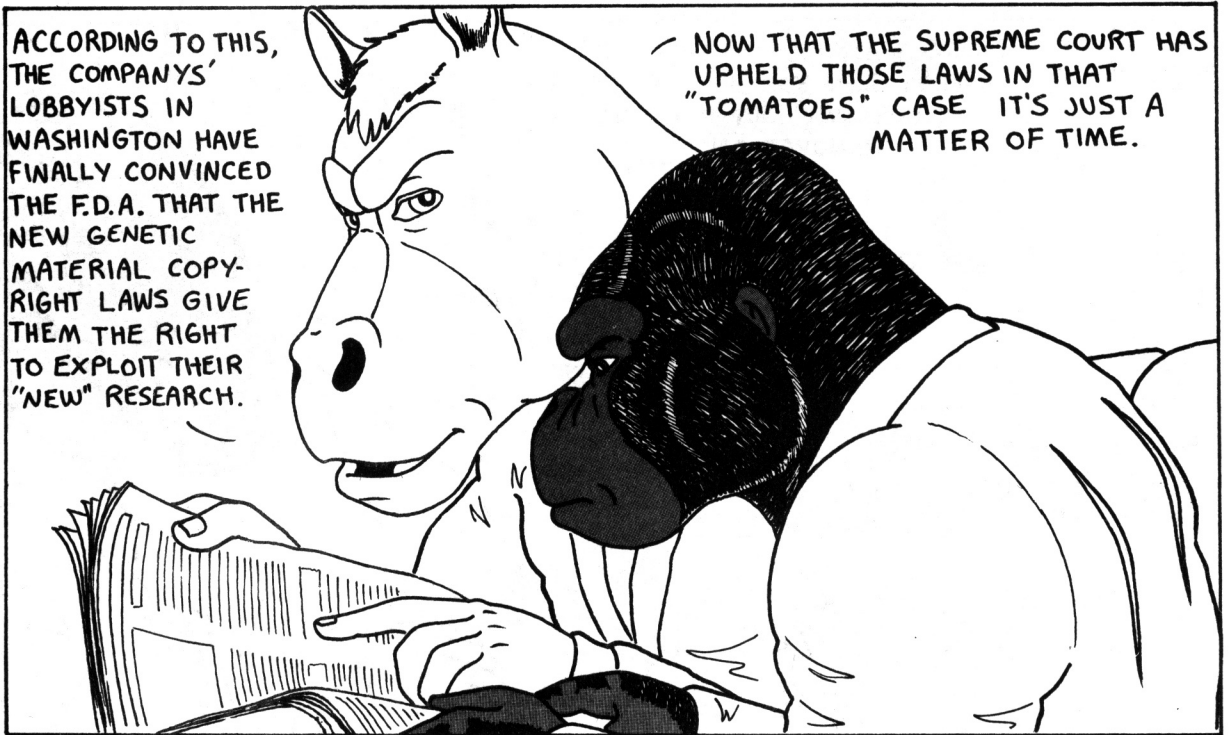
GOT A JOB ON  
THAT NEW PUBLIC  
HOUSING RE-HAB  
DOWN AT THE ADA  
B. WELLS HOMES  
COMPLEX.



THEY SHUT EVERYTHING  
DOWN THURSDAY. WE  
WERE HAVING A LOT OF  
TROUBLE WITH THE  
GANGS STEALING TOOLS  
EQUIPMENT AND EVEN  
TRUCKS. THEN, LAST  
WEEK, THEY FOUND  
OUT ONE OF THE  
CONTRACTORS WAS  
BEHIND ALL THE  
THEFT. HE WAS  
MOVING ALL THE  
STUFF TO A JOB  
SITE DOWN IN  
INDIANA SOME-  
PLACE. WE'RE ON  
HOLD FOR AT  
LEAST A WEEK.  
OH, BY THE WAY,  
DIDJA HEAR THE  
"LAB" IS BACK  
ON TRACK WITH  
THEIR "NEW" ROUGH  
PROGRAM?



WHHAAATT??  
YOU'RE KIDD-  
ING. AFTER  
ALL THE SHIT  
WE'VE BEEN  
THROUGH  
THEY STILL  
GOT THE  
APPROVAL?



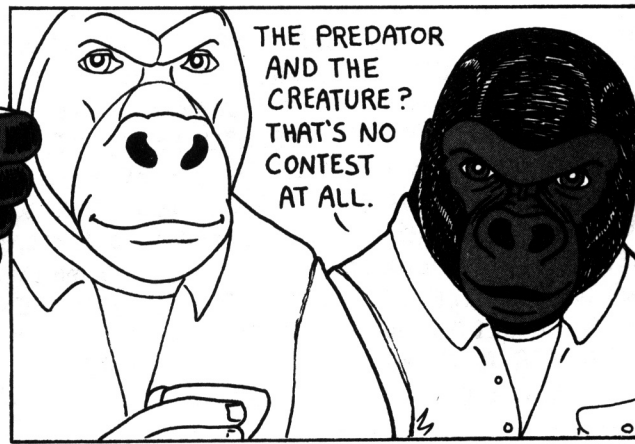
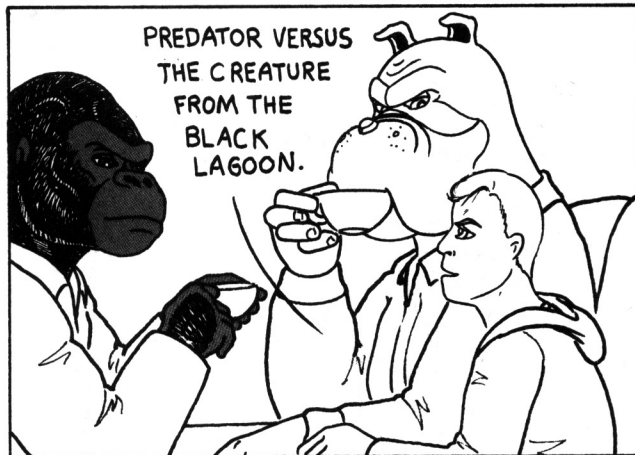
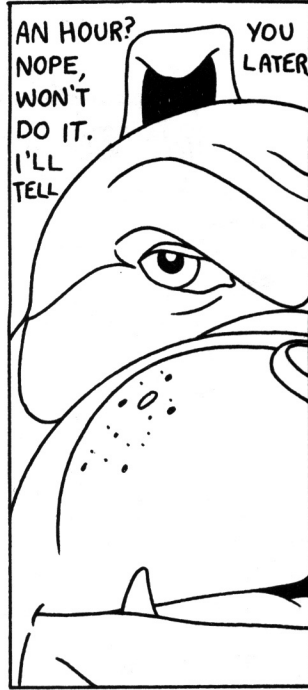
ACCORDING TO THIS,  
THE COMPANYS'  
LOBBYISTS IN  
WASHINGTON HAVE  
FINALLY CONVINCED  
THE F.D.A. THAT THE  
NEW GENETIC  
MATERIAL COPY-  
RIGHT LAWS GIVE  
THEM THE RIGHT  
TO EXPLOIT THEIR  
"NEW" RESEARCH.

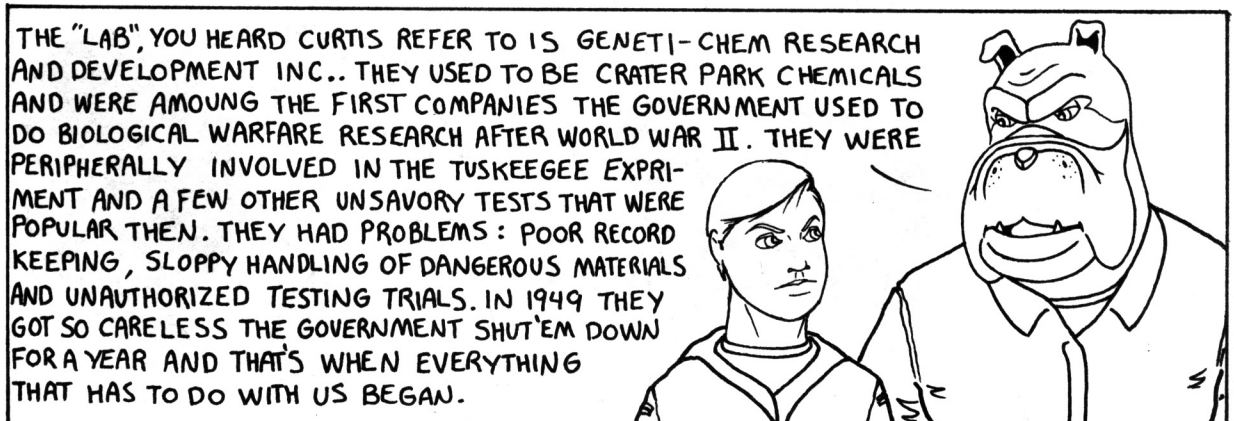
NOW THAT THE SUPREME COURT HAS  
UPHELD THOSE LAWS IN THAT  
"TOMATOES" CASE IT'S JUST A  
MATTER OF TIME.



GOD DAMN! IT'S JUST  
INCONCEIVABLE THEY'D  
TRY THE SAME THING  
AGAIN. WHAT THE HELL  
DO THEY THINK IS  
GONNA HAPPEN  
THIS TIME?

SPIKE, I DON'T GET IT.  
I MEAN, ASIDE FROM  
ALL THE TROUBLE  
ROUGHS HAVE HAD  
LATELY, WHAT WENT  
DOWN THE FIRST  
TIME?



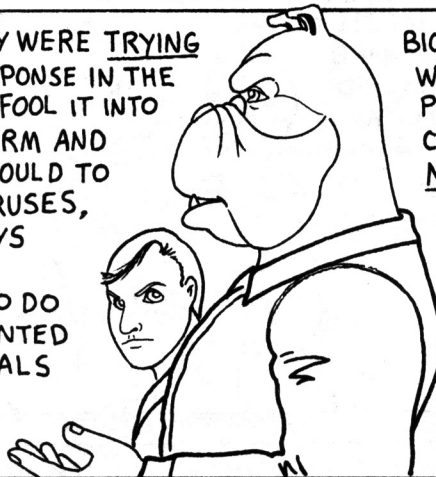






WE'LL PROBABLY NEVER KNOW THE WHOLE STORY BUT IT FIGURES OUT SOMETHING LIKE THIS: DURING 1947 AND '48 A DR. AVERY FRUTHERMANN WAS DEVELOPING A TOXIN THAT WOULD SLOWLY STERILIZE MEN AND WOMEN WITHOUT CAUSING ANY NOTICABLE SIDE EFFECTS. THE IDEA WAS TO CONTAMINATE WATER AND FOOD SUPPLIES BY A VARIETY OF SUBTLE METHODS AND THEN SIT BACK AND WATCH THE POPULATIONS OF THE OFFENDING COUNTRIES DRASTICLY START TO FALL. YOU COULD THEN WAIT FOR SOME CRISIS TO DEVELOP AND MOVE IN TO TAKE WHATEVER ADVANTAGE OF THE SITUATION YOU COULD. NO RECORDS OF FRUTHERMANN'S HAVE EVER COME TO LIGHT TO SHOW HOW THIS CHEMICAL WAS SUPPOSED TO WORK ON EITHER SEX BUT LATER UNRELATED STUDIES THEY DID ON SOME OF OUR MOTHERS GAVE SOME SCIENTISTS A CLUE.

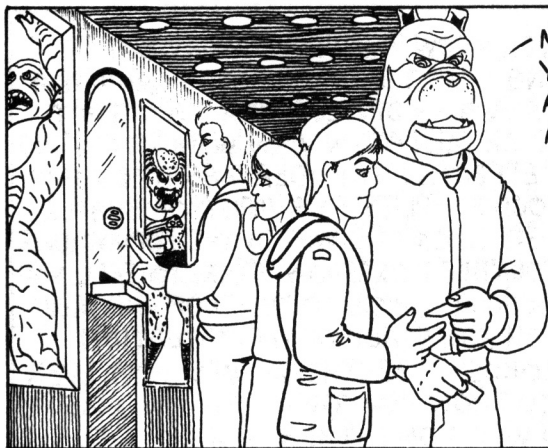
IT APPEARS THAT WHAT THEY WERE TRYING TO DO WAS TRIGGER A RESPONSE IN THE HUMAN BODY THAT WOULD FOOL IT INTO REACTING TO HUMAN SPERM AND EGG CELLS THE WAY IT WOULD TO DISEASE GERMS AND VIRUSES, TO SOMEHOW GET THE BODY'S DEFENSE MECHANISMS TO ATTACK AND KILL THEM. TO DO THIS THEY HAD EXPERIMENTED WITH ALL KINDS OF ANIMALS TO DEVELOPE THE KIND OF COMPLEX BROAD RANGED



BIOLOGICAL 'SHOTGUN' THAT WOULD WORK ON ALL KINDS OF PEOPLE UNDER A LOT OF DIFFERENT CIRCUMSTANCES. WHAT THEY COULD NOT UNDERSTAND AT THAT TIME, AND WHAT TOOK OTHERS TWENTY MORE YEARS TO BEGIN TO SEE, WAS THAT THEY'D STUMBLLED ONTO A FORMULA THAT BROKE APART AND RE-COMBINED THE D.N.A. STRANDS.

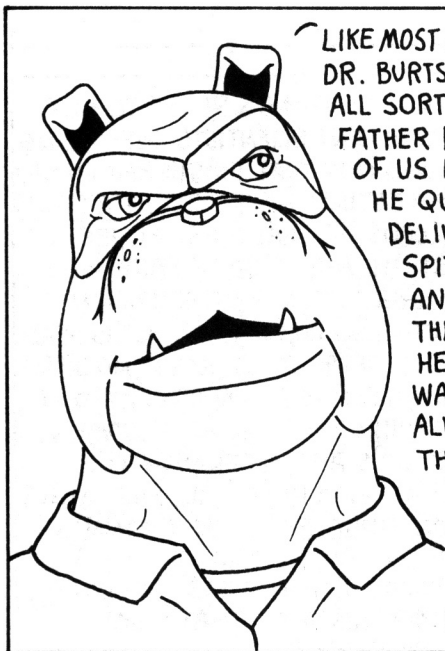


NOW? THIS IS WHERE THINGS START TO GET TRICKY. THE GOVERNMENT SCIENTISTS OVERSEEING THE PROJECT FOUND OUT THAT FRUTHERMANN HAD BEEN SECRETLY TESTING HIS SERUM AT A PUBLIC HOSPITAL. NO RECORDS OF THAT EXIST EITHER. IT WAS THE LAST STRAW AND CRATER PARK WAS SHUT DOWN. A YEAR LATER FRUTHERMANN SURFACED IN A CHICAGO PUBLIC HOSPITAL AS HEAD OF THE PEDIATRICS DEPARTMENT. AGAIN, NO DIRECT RECORDS EXIST BUT OTHER DEPARTMENTS LISTED IN THEIR MEDICAL REPORTS THAT INDIGENT WOMEN BEING GIVEN CHECKUPS AND PREGNANCY TESTS WERE RECIEVING AN EXPERIMENTAL PAIN-KILLER ANTI-INFLAMATION DRUG BY FRUTHERMANN'S KEY ASSISTANT, A DR LOUIS HURM. THERE ARE NO "OFFICIAL" RECORDS OF ANY TESTS CARRIED OUT BY FRUTHERMANN OR HURM AT THAT TIME.



— NOTHING OF ANY CONSEQUENCE HAPPENED FOR A FEW YEARS, AT LEAST NOTHING WE KNOW ABOUT, BUT THAT ALL CHANGED IN 1950. CHICAGO'S THREE BIG PAPERS AT THE TIME CARRIED VARIOUS STORIES ABOUT A SUDDEN, UNEXPLAINABLE SURGE IN THE NUMBER OF DEFORMED BABIES BEING BORN AT THAT HOSPITAL DURING THAT YEAR. AT FIRST, IT WAS A SCIENTIFIC CURIOSITY AND A LOT OF EXPERTS FROM ALL OVER WERE COMING HERE AND THEORIZING ON HOW IT COULD HAPPEN. BUT AS THE NUMBER OF ABNORMAL BIRTHS INCREASED AND BEGAN TO SPREAD TO OTHER HOSPITALS A LOT OF PEOPLE GOT SCARED AND THEY GOT THE MEDIA TO HUSH IT UP.

THIS IS WHERE ANOTHER MAN COMES IN, SOMEONE EVERY ROUGH THAT SURVIVED OWES THEIR LIFE TO. A CONSIDERABLE EFFORT WAS MADE TO COLLECT ALL OF THE DEFORMED BABIES IN A PREMATURE WARD AT ONE HOSPITAL. EVERYONE INVOLVED HAS DENIED IT FOR YEARS BUT TWO YEARS AGO SOME EYEWITNESSES SAID THAT ALL THE BABIES AFFECTED BY THIS "PROBLEM" WERE NOT TO SURVIVE. IF THAT WAS THEIR PLAN THEY MADE A BIG MISTAKE. A MAN NAMED HARLEN BURTSTRÖM WAS HEAD PEDIATRICIAN AT THE HOSPITAL WHERE WE WERE ALL DUMPED.



— LIKE MOST ROUGHS I GOT TO KNOW DR. BURTSTRÖM PRETTY WELL. WE ALL SORT OF CONSIDERED HIM OUR FATHER FIGURE SINCE VERY FEW OF US KNEW OUR REAL ONES. HE QUIETLY AGREED TO ACCEPT DELIVERY OF US ALL THEN, IN SPITE OF ALL THE POLITICAL AND PROFESSIONAL PRESSURE THEY THREATENED HIM WITH, HE DID EVERY THING THAT WAS POSSIBLE TO KEEP US ALIVE. OUT OF 1020 BABIES THAT MADE IT TO HIS CARE OVER THAT YEAR, ALL BUT 6 LIVED. THAT COMPARES TO ONLY 412 FROM ALL THE OTHERS COMBINED.

I REMEMBER, YEARS AGO, I MUST HAVE BEEN TWELVE OR SO, ASKING HIM WHY SO MANY PEOPLE WANTED US TO DIE AND WHY HE SAVED US. HE SAID IT WAS BECAUSE WE WERE ALL LIVING, WALKING REMINDERS OF HOW BADLY PEOPLE COULD FAIL

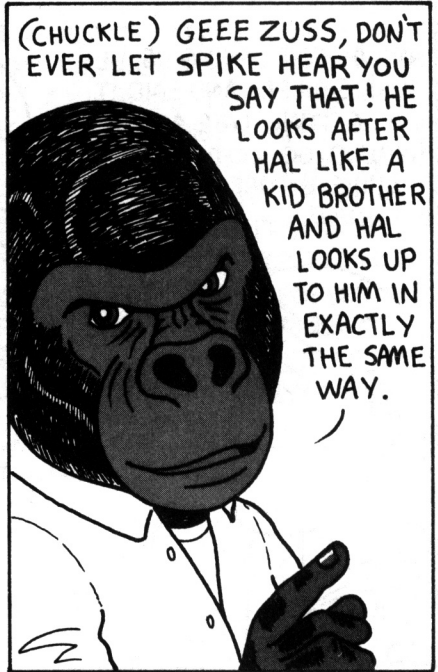


THE COUNTRY AT A TIME WHEN WE COULDN'T ADMIT FAILURE, AND, HOW WILLINGLY EVERYONE ELSE WOULD LET THEM GET AWAY WITH IT.





ADRIAN, WHAT EXACTLY IS IT BETWEEN SPIKE AND HAL? I'M NEVER SURE WHAT TO SAY. I MEAN, DO THEY HAVE SOMETHING GOING?

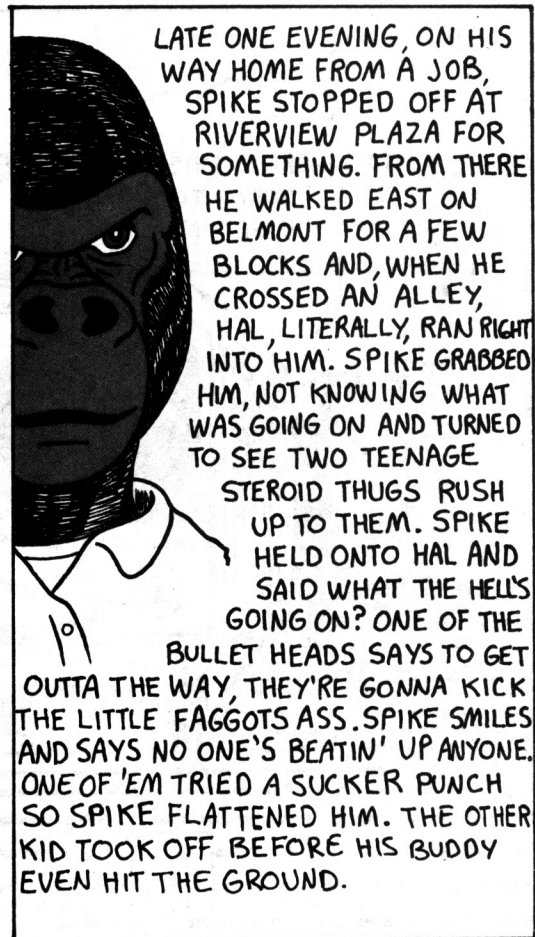


(CHUCKLE) GEEE ZUSS, DON'T EVER LET SPIKE HEAR YOU SAY THAT! HE LOOKS AFTER HAL LIKE A KID BROTHER AND HAL LOOKS UP TO HIM IN EXACTLY THE SAME WAY.



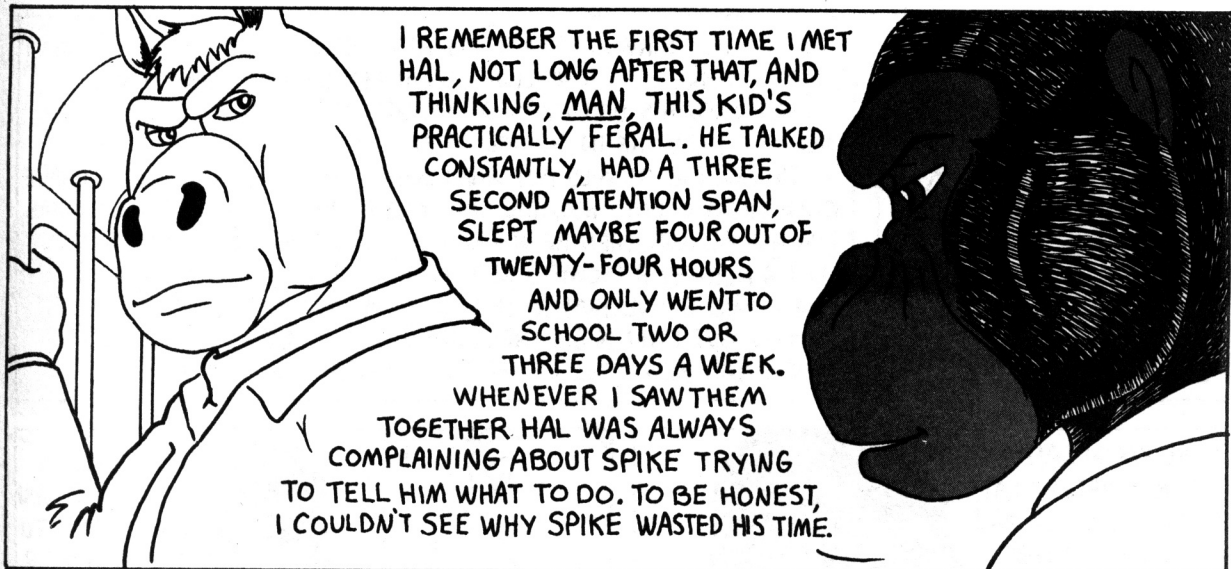
SPIKE FIRST MET HAL THREE YEARS AGO. HE WAS 13 OR 14 THEN. HE WAS ONE OF THOSE BELMONT-WESTERN AVE.

STREET KIDS. HIS FATHER'S AN UNEMPLOYED STEEL WORKER WITH A DRINKING PROBLEM. I DON'T KNOW WHAT HAPPENED TO HIS MOTHER. SPIKE TOLD ME SINCE HAL'S BEEN 10, HIS OLD MAN'S BEEN KICKING HIM OUTTA THE HOUSE ON WEEKENDS AND, SOMETIMES, LOCKS THE PLACE UP AND DISAPPEARS FOR ONE OR TWO WEEKS AT A STRETCH. HAL'S HAD TO LIVE IN FAST FOOD SHOPS AND VIDEO GAME ROOMS.

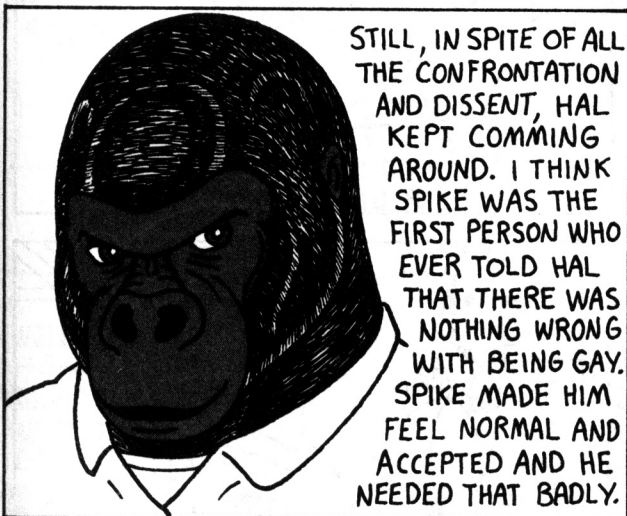


LATE ONE EVENING, ON HIS WAY HOME FROM A JOB, SPIKE STOPPED OFF AT RIVERVIEW PLAZA FOR SOMETHING. FROM THERE HE WALKED EAST ON BELMONT FOR A FEW BLOCKS AND, WHEN HE CROSSED AN ALLEY, HAL, LITERALLY, RAN RIGHT INTO HIM. SPIKE GRABBED HIM, NOT KNOWING WHAT WAS GOING ON AND TURNED TO SEE TWO TEENAGE STERIOD THUGS RUSH UP TO THEM. SPIKE HELD ONTO HAL AND SAID WHAT THE HELL'S GOING ON? ONE OF THE BULLET HEADS SAYS TO GET OUTTA THE WAY, THEY'RE GONNA KICK THE LITTLE FAGGOTS ASS. SPIKE SMILES AND SAYS NO ONE'S BEATIN' UP ANYONE. ONE OF 'EM TRIED A SUCKER PUNCH SO SPIKE FLATTENED HIM. THE OTHER KID TOOK OFF BEFORE HIS BUDDY EVEN HIT THE GROUND.

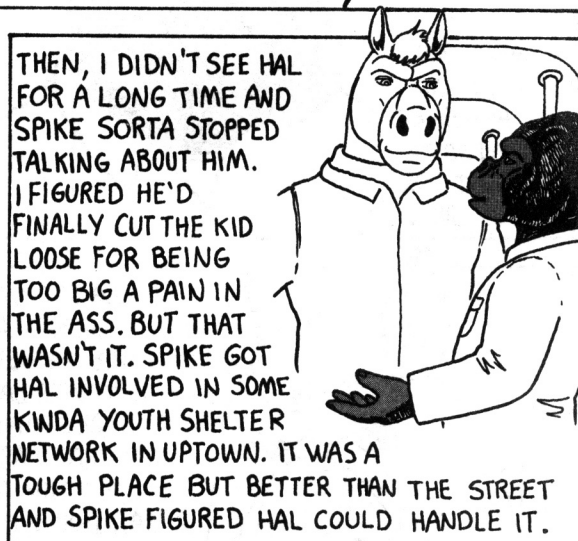




I REMEMBER THE FIRST TIME I MET HAL, NOT LONG AFTER THAT, AND THINKING, MAN, THIS KID'S PRACTICALLY FERAL. HE TALKED CONSTANTLY, HAD A THREE SECOND ATTENTION SPAN, SLEPT MAYBE FOUR OUT OF TWENTY-FOUR HOURS AND ONLY WENT TO SCHOOL TWO OR THREE DAYS A WEEK. WHENEVER I SAW THEM TOGETHER HAL WAS ALWAYS COMPLAINING ABOUT SPIKE TRYING TO TELL HIM WHAT TO DO. TO BE HONEST, I COULDN'T SEE WHY SPIKE WASTED HIS TIME.

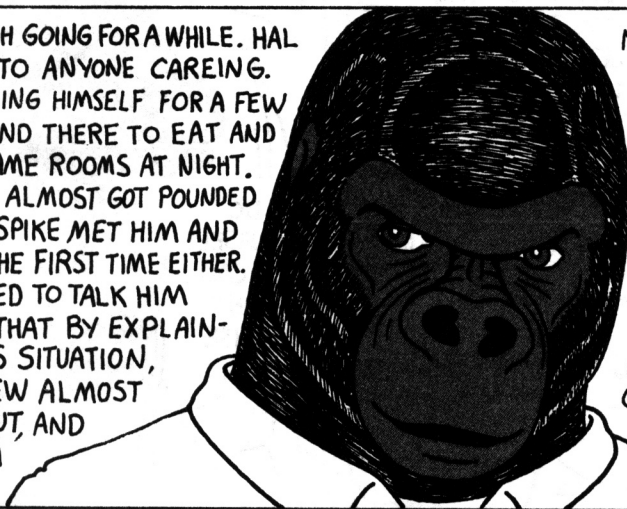


STILL, IN SPITE OF ALL THE CONFRONTATION AND DISSENT, HAL KEPT COMING AROUND. I THINK SPIKE WAS THE FIRST PERSON WHO EVER TOLD HAL THAT THERE WAS NOTHING WRONG WITH BEING GAY. SPIKE MADE HIM FEEL NORMAL AND ACCEPTED AND HE NEEDED THAT BADLY.



THEN, I DIDN'T SEE HAL FOR A LONG TIME AND SPIKE SORTA STOPPED TALKING ABOUT HIM. I FIGURED HE'D FINALLY CUT THE KID LOOSE FOR BEING TOO BIG A PAIN IN THE ASS. BUT THAT WASN'T IT. SPIKE GOT HAL INVOLVED IN SOME KINDA YOUTH SHELTER NETWORK IN UPTOWN. IT WAS A TOUGH PLACE BUT BETTER THAN THE STREET AND SPIKE FIGURED HAL COULD HANDLE IT.

IT WAS ROUGH GOING FOR A WHILE. HAL WASN'T USED TO ANYONE CAREING. HE WAS SELLING HIMSELF FOR A FEW BUCKS HERE AND THERE TO EAT AND STAY IN THE GAME ROOMS AT NIGHT. THAT'S HOW HE ALMOST GOT POUNDED THE EVENING SPIKE MET HIM AND THAT WASN'T THE FIRST TIME EITHER. SPIKE MANAGED TO TALK HIM OUTTA DOING THAT BY EXPLAINING THE AIDS SITUATION, WHICH HE KNEW ALMOST NOTHING ABOUT, AND GIVING HIM A FEW DOLLARS

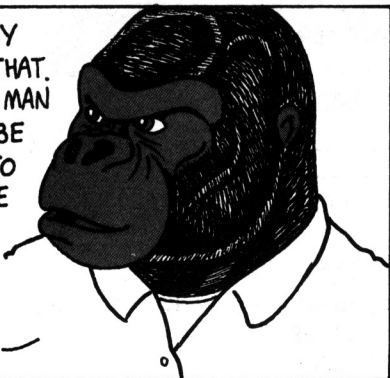


NOW AND THEN. ALSO, LETTING HIM IN ON SOME OF THE THINGS WE DID OCCASIONALLY GAVE HIM A CHANCE TO BE WITH ADULTS WHO WOULD LISTEN TO HIS PROBLEMS AND UNDERSTAND THEM. WE GOT A CHANCE TO TEACH HIM THAT BEING GAY DIDN'T AUTOMATICALLY MEAN HE HAD TO FUCK EVERY OTHER GAY MAN IN THE WORLD. HE FOUND OUT THERE WERE PEOPLE WHO WERE WILLING TO BE HIS FRIENDS WITHOUT WANTING ANYTHING ELSE.



EACH TIME I SAW HAL OVER THE NEXT YEAR HE WAS LIKE A DIFFERENT PERSON. SPIKE TAUGHT HIM HOW TO EAT BETTER AND WITH A PLACE TO SLEEP WHEN HIS DAD CHASED HIM OUT, HE FOUND OUT HE COULD ACTUALLY DO HIS WORK IN SCHOOL. THEN, SOMETHING HAPPENED. I DON'T KNOW ALL THE DETAILS BUT WHAT SPIKE TOLD ME IS HE GOT A PHONE CALL FROM COUNTY HOSPITAL LATE ONE NIGHT. HAL HADN'T BEEN HOME FOR AWHILE AND WHEN HE WALKED IN HIS FATHER BEAT HIM SO BADLY THAT A NEIGHBOR, SOME BIKER, PICKED HIM UP OFF THE FRONT SIDEWALK AND DROVE HIM TO THE HOSPITAL. I'M NOT SURE, I'VE NEVER ASKED, BUT I THINK BEFORE SPIKE WENT TO SEE HAL HE WENT OVER AND BEAT THE LIVIN' FUCK OUTTA HIS OLD MAN.

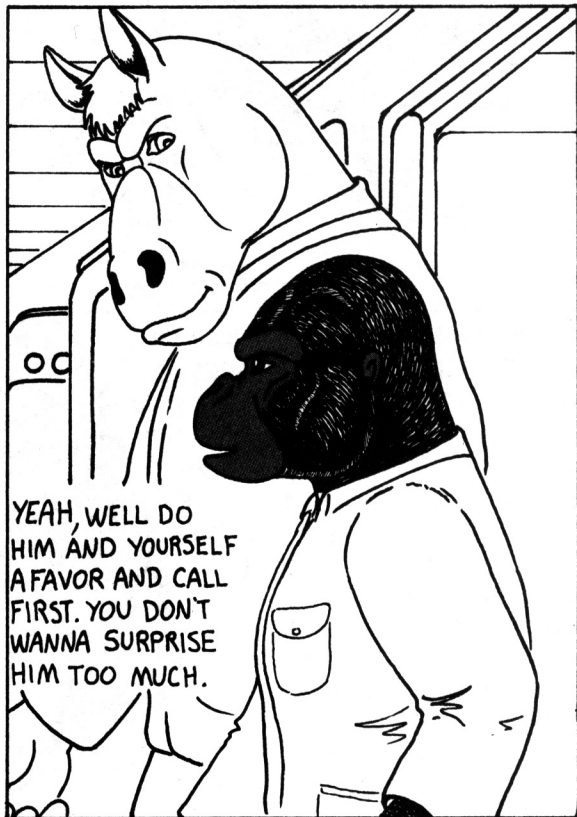
THERE WASN'T ANY TROUBLE AFTER THAT. MAYBE HALS' OLD MAN WAS SCARED, MAYBE TOO SHITFACED TO REMEMBER BUT HE NEVER HIT HAL AGAIN AND SPIKE HAS BEEN SORTA LOOKIN' OUT FOR HIM EVER SINCE.



WELL, THIS IS HOWARD ST. YOU TRANSFERING TO GO NORTH OR GETTING OFF HERE?



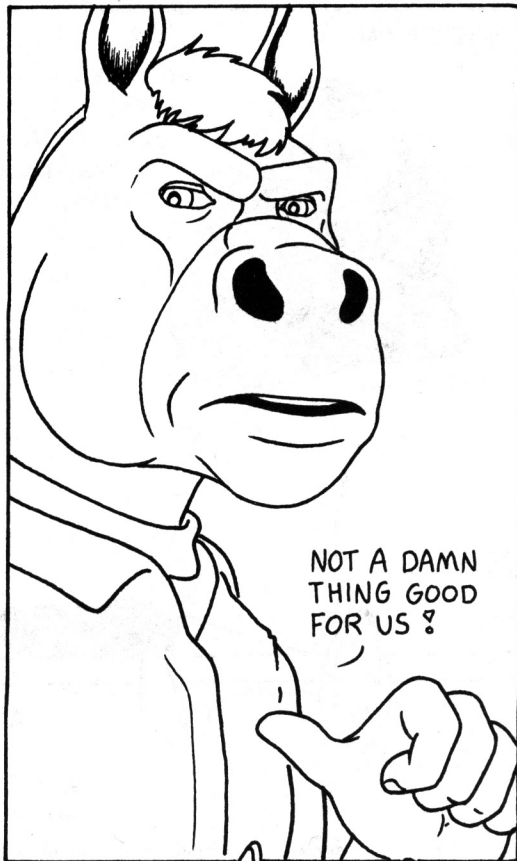
I'M GONNA GET OFF HERE. THERE'S A SMOOTHIE I KNOW, A CORPORATE LAWYER OF ALL THINGS, WHO'S CRAZY ABOUT ME. I MET HIM AT A BAR DOWN ON HALSTEAD AND HE'S ALWAYS TELLING ME TO DROP BY WHEN I'M IN TOWN. I THINK I'LL SURPRISE THE HELL OUT OF HIM AND DO IT.



YEAH, WELL DO HIM AND YOURSELF A FAVOR AND CALL FIRST. YOU DON'T WANNA SURPRISE HIM TOO MUCH.

YOU WERE RIGHT. HE'LL BE HERE  
IN TWENTY MINUTES TO PICK ME  
UP. I'LL WAIT HERE 'TILL YOUR  
TRAIN COMES.

CURTIS, WHAT DO  
YOU THINK WILL  
HAPPEN IF THE  
"LAB" DOES ANY  
MORE "ROUGH"  
TRIALS.



NOT A DAMN  
THING GOOD  
FOR US ?

WELL, WHAT COULD THEY DO?  
IT'S NOT AS IF THEY COULD  
ROUND US UP LIKE THEY  
WANTED TO BACK IN THE  
EARLY SEVENTIES.



YEAH AND EXCEPT FOR US  
WHO REMEMBERS, LET ALONE  
CARES, WHAT WE WENT  
THROUGH TWENTY-ODD  
YEARS AGO. HELL, MOST  
PEOPLE IN THIS COUNTRY  
COULDN'T TELL YOU WHAT  
HAPPENED IN THE MID-  
EAST LAST WEEK. THIS  
"NEW RESEARCH" PRO-  
GRAM IS JUST THE  
FIRST STEP TO  
PUTTING US ALL  
IN CAGES.





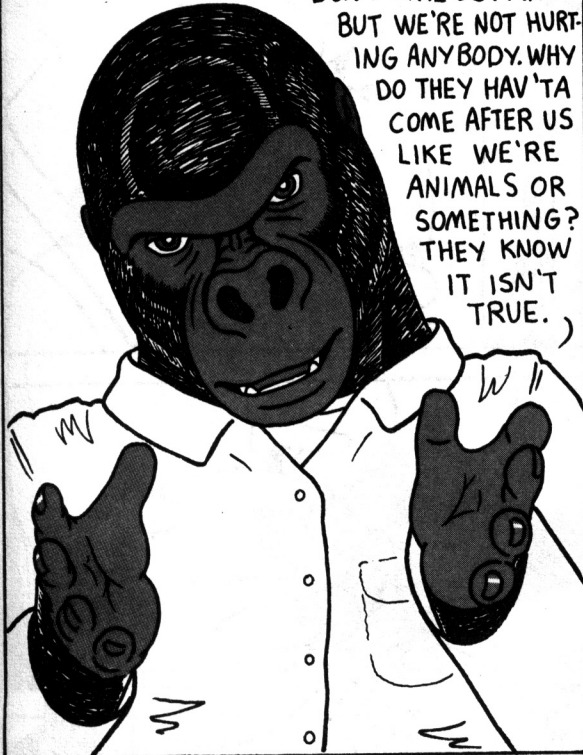
AWW C'MON. WHAT? THEY'RE JUST GONNA THROW US IN JAIL BECAUSE OF THE WAY WE LOOK? HOW MANY TIMES DO WE HAV'TA PROVE WE'RE HUMAN BEINGS? WE'VE BEEN THROUGH ALL THIS.

THAT'S JUST IT. HOW MANY TIMES? TRY EVERY TIME, EVERYDAY TO EVERYONE, OVER AND OVER AND OVER. PEOPLE WILL NEVER ACCEPT US BECAUSE THEY DON'T WANT TO.

ADRIAN, TRY LOOKING AT US FROM THE "OTHER SIDE" FOR A MOMENT. WE'VE ALWAYS BEEN AN EMBARRASSMENT, A PROBLEM SOCIETY WISHED WOULD JUST GO AWAY. WHENEVER SOMEONE LOOKS AT US, NO MATTER HOW HARD THEY TRY TO DISGUISE IT, THEY'RE REMINDED OF JUST HOW LOW PEOPLE CAN SINK FOR THE PURPOSE OF GETTING WHATEVER THEY WANT. YOU NAME IT: MONEY, POWER, FAME, GRACE, IF SOMBODY DECIDES IT'S GOOD AND RIGHT THERE'S NO CRIME THEY WON'T COMMIT TO GET IT. THAT'S A HARD TRUTH TO FACE UP TO AND IT'S A HELL OF A LOT EASIER TO PRETEND IT DOESN'T EXIST. AND THAT'S OUR BIGGEST PROBLEM. TO MOST PEOPLE WE'RE INVISIBLE, WE DON'T EXIST. THEY LOOK RIGHT THROUGH US AND WE HAVE TO FIGHT A CONSTANT BATTLE JUST TO MAINTAIN WHAT LITTLE CONSIDERATION WE CAN GET. AND ALL OF THIS PLAYS RIGHT INTO GENETI-CHEMS HANDS. YOU THINK THEY DON'T KNOW WHAT'S GOING ON IN THIS COUNTRY? YOU THINK THEY'RE NOT RIGHT IN THERE FANNING THE FLAMES OF SOCIAL, POLITICAL AND RELIGIOUS HATRED? AND WHAT BETTER TARGET THAN GAYS AND LESBIANS FOR THEIR HOMOSEXUALITY, ROUGHS FOR BEING "INHUMAN" AND US FOR BEING BOTH.



BUT WHY?! O.K., WE'RE GAY. A LOTTA PEOPLE DON'T LIKE US. FINE! BUT WE'RE NOT HURTING ANYBODY. WHY DO THEY HAV'TA COME AFTER US LIKE WE'RE ANIMALS OR SOMETHING? THEY KNOW IT ISN'T TRUE.

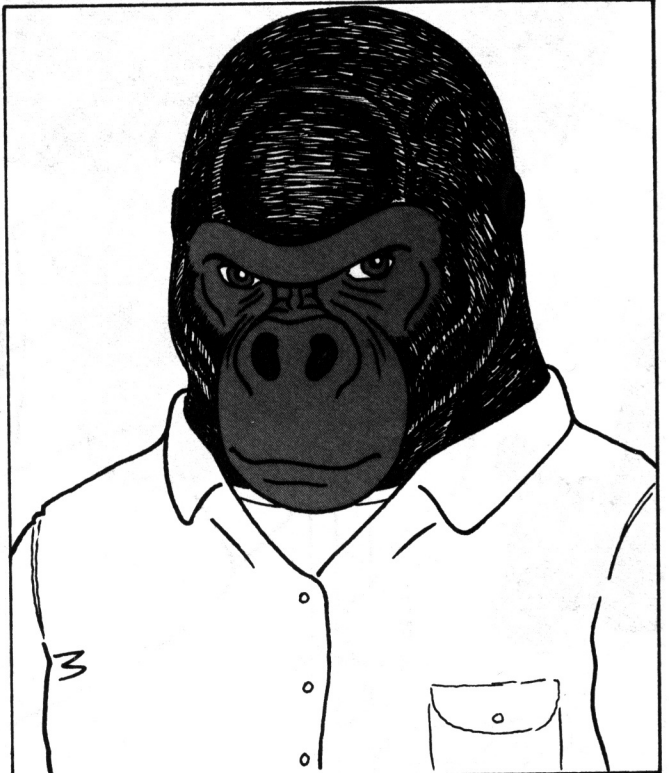


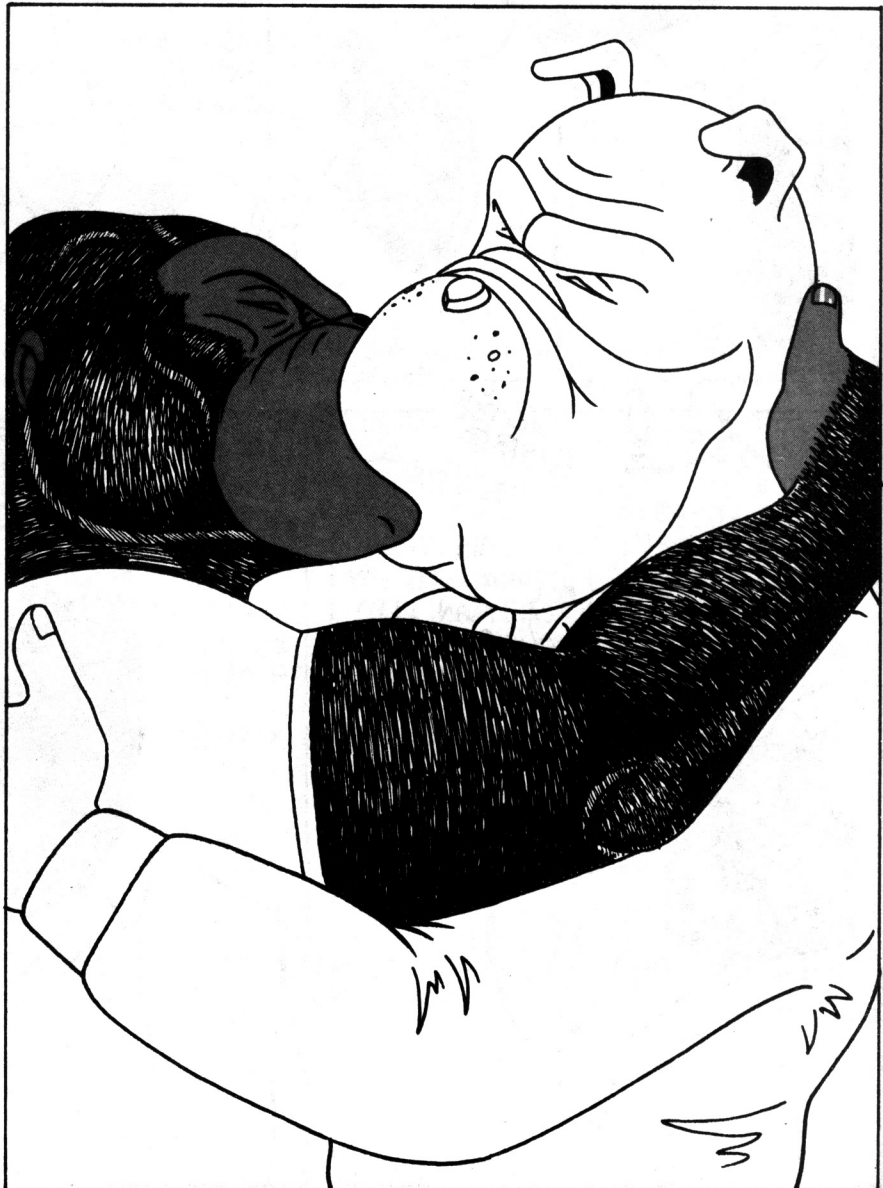
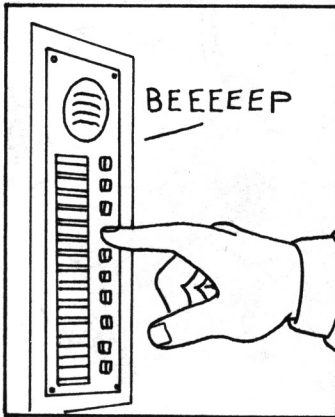
PAL, YOU BETTER BONE UP ON YOUR HISTORY A LITTLE. THAT'S THE WAY IT ALWAYS STARTS. FIRST THEY TELL YOU THEY'RE BETTER THAN EVERYONE ELSE, THEN THEY ATTACK THE GAY COMMUNITY FOR IT'S "IMMORALITY," WE LOSE OUR STATUS AS PEOPLE WITH RIGHTS AND SUDDENLY, WE DISAPPEAR. AND NO ONE CARES.



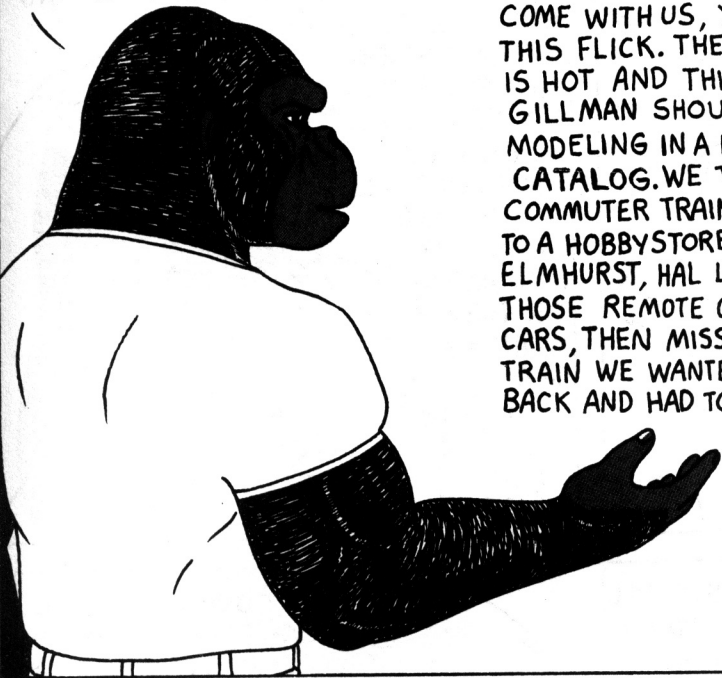
BEEP  
BEEP  
BEEP

AHH. THAT MUST BE MY MAN. I'LL SEE YA AROUND ADRIAN. DON'T WORK TOO HARD TODAY.





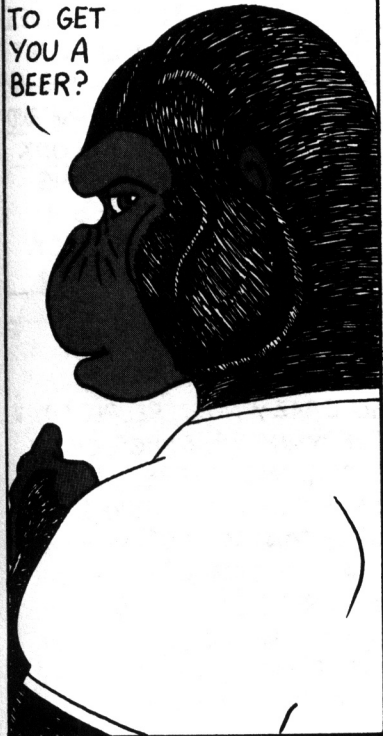
SO, WHAT HAPPENED? DID'JA  
STAY 'AN SEE IT TWICE?



NAH, ALTHOUGH WE'RE GOIN' AGAIN  
IN A WEEK OR SO. YOU SHOULD  
COME WITH US, YOU GOTTA SEE  
THIS FLICK. THE PREDATOR  
IS HOT AND THIS NEW  
GILLMAN SHOULD BE  
MODELING IN A LEATHER  
CATALOG. WE TOOK A  
COMMUTER TRAIN OUT  
TO A HOBBYSTORE IN  
ELMHURST, HAL LIKES  
THOSE REMOTE CONTROL  
CARS, THEN MISSED THE  
TRAIN WE WANTED COMMING  
BACK AND HAD TO WAIT  
AN HOUR.



WELL, I'M GLAD YOU COULD  
MAKE IT. I REALLY NEEDED  
YOU TONIGHT. WANT ME  
TO GET  
YOU A  
BEER?



NO THANKS. I WANT TO KEEP MY  
HEAD CLEAR FOR SOME SERIOUS  
MANHANDLING THAT'S BEEN GIVIN'  
ME HARDONS ALL  
DAY JUST THINKIN'  
ABOUT. WHAT'S  
WRONG BUDDY?  
YOU SEEM A  
LITTLE DOWN.  
YOU DIDN'T  
REALLY THINK  
I WOULDN'T  
COME BY  
DID YOU?



NO, I KNEW YOU'D BE HERE. IT'S JUST THAT I WAS TALKIN' TO CURTIS AND HE WAS SAYING...



NO, DON'T TELL ME, LEMME GUESS: THE POLITICAL AND RELIGIOUS BROWNSHIRTS ARE ASSEMBLED JUST OUTSIDE THE CITY AND ANY DAY NOW THEY'LL BE BEATING DOWN OUR DOORS AND HAULING US AWAY AT GUNPOINT TO THE EXTERMINATION CAMPS.



WELL, NOT EXAAACTLY LIKE THAT. BUT STILL, WELL, AREN'T YOU A LITTLE WORRIED ABOUT THE "LAB" AND WHAT ALL'S GOIN' ON?



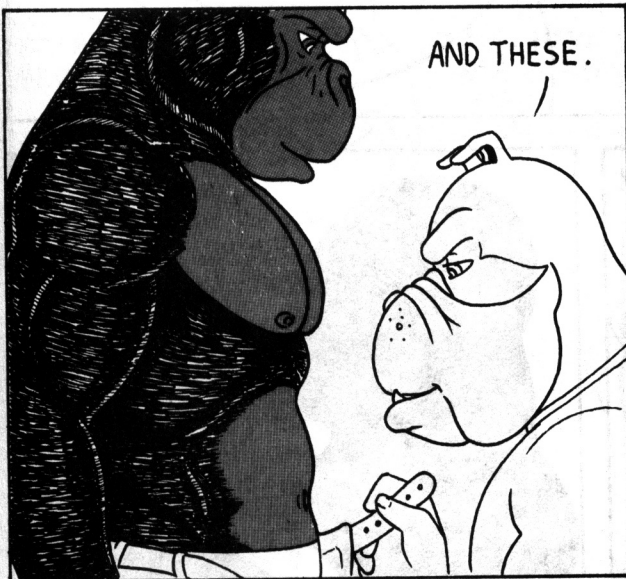
OF COURSE I AM. WE CAN'T EVER CLOSE OUR EYES, LET ALONE TURN OUR BACKS, ON WHAT THE "LAB" OR ANYONE ELSE DOES TO CHEAT US OUT OF WHAT WE EARN FOR OURSELVES. BUT DON'T LET CURT PANIC YOU. I'VE KNOWN HIM A LONG TIME AND HE LOVES TO LOOK AT EVERYTHING LIKE THERE'S A HUGE CONSPIRACY.

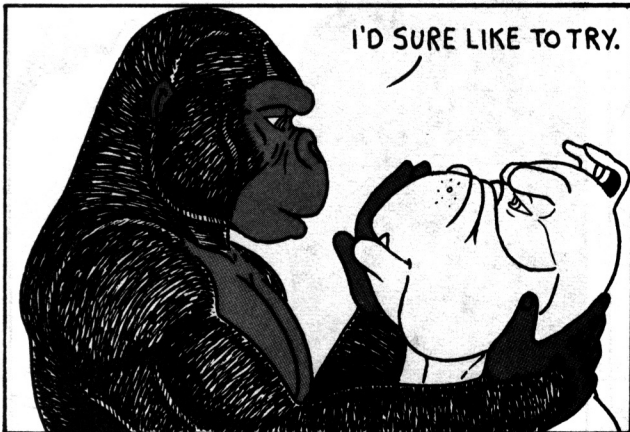
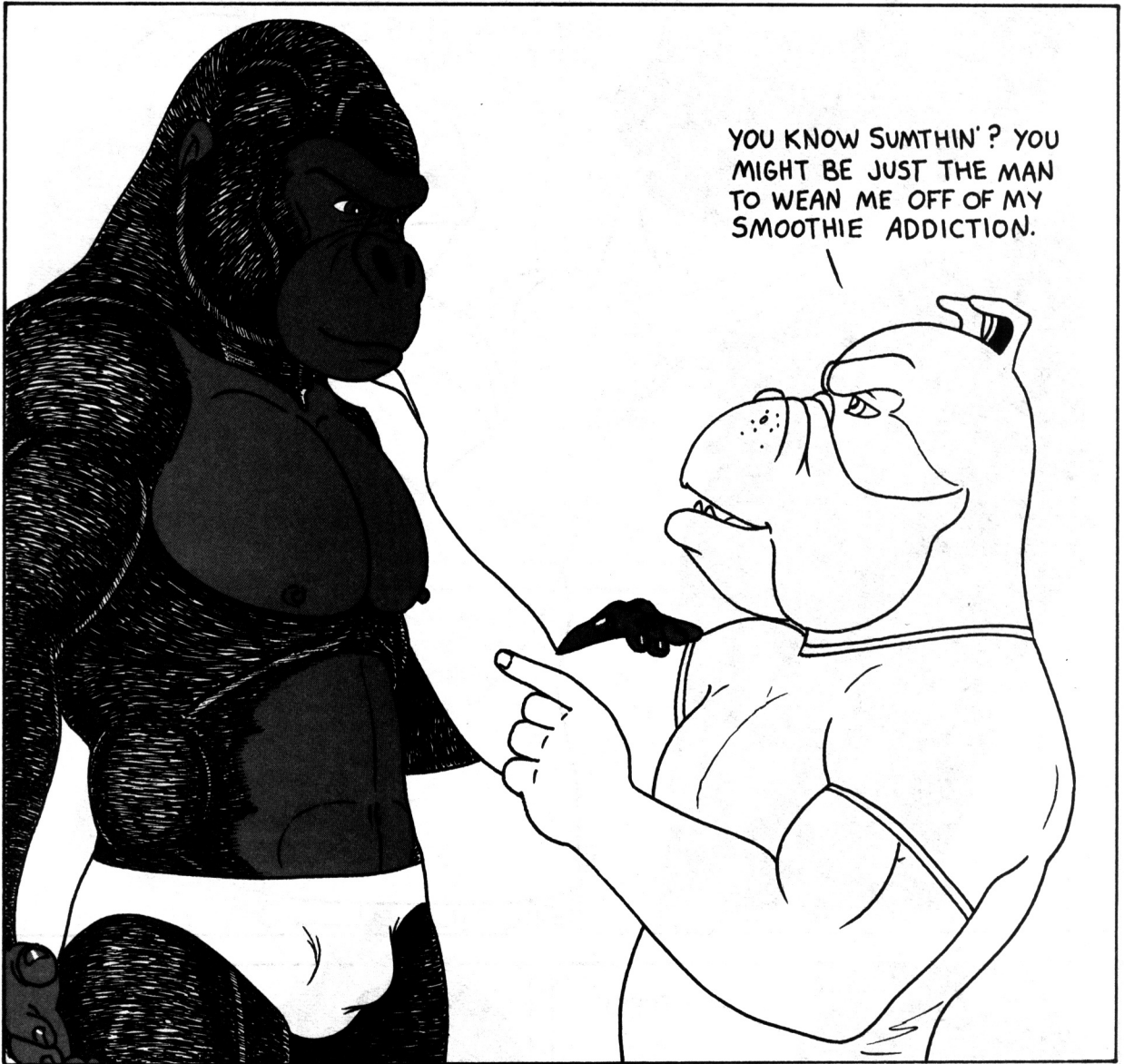
YEAH. I GUESS. I GUESS ALL THAT STUFF JUST SCARES ME.

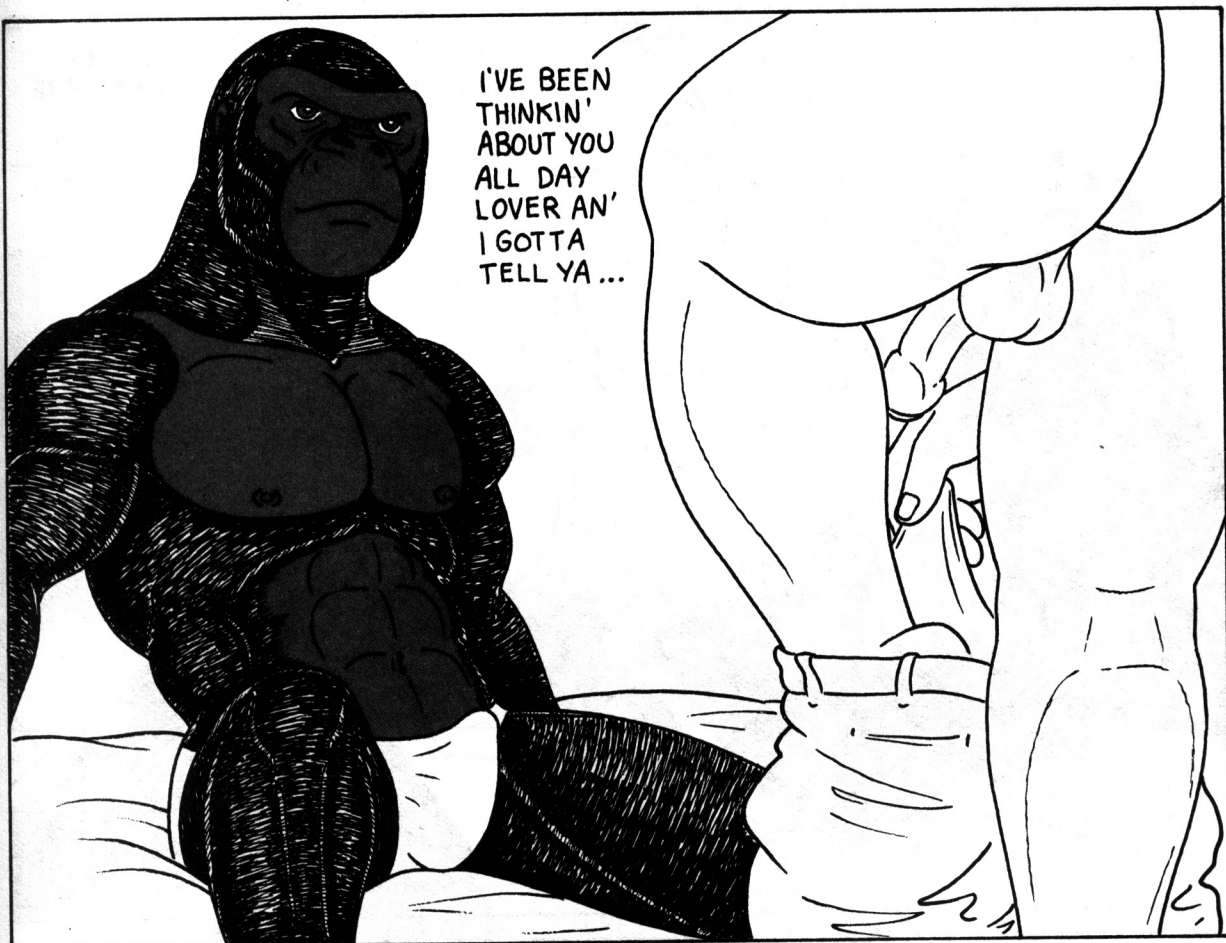


HEY, EVERYBODY'S SCARED. THAT'S ONE OF THE MAIN REASONS THINGS ARE SO CRAZY NOW. PEOPLE LOSIN' JOBS EVERYWHERE, DRUGS, CRIME, AIDS FREAKING EVERYONE OUT. PEOPLE FEEL THEIR FUTURE'S OUT OF THEIR CONTROL SO THEY LASH OUT AT ANYTHING JUST TO GET SOME PRIDE BACK. IT'S A TIME HONORED AMERICAN TRADITION AND THEY JUST FIGURE WE'RE AN EASY TARGET.

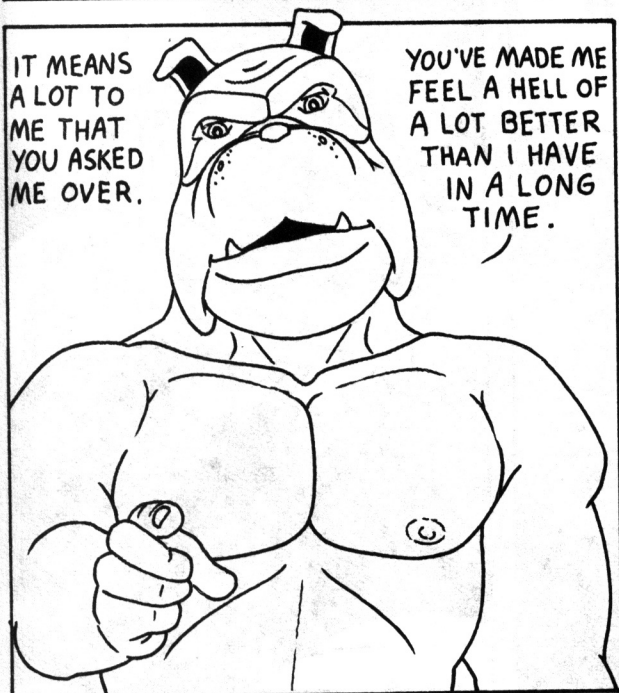






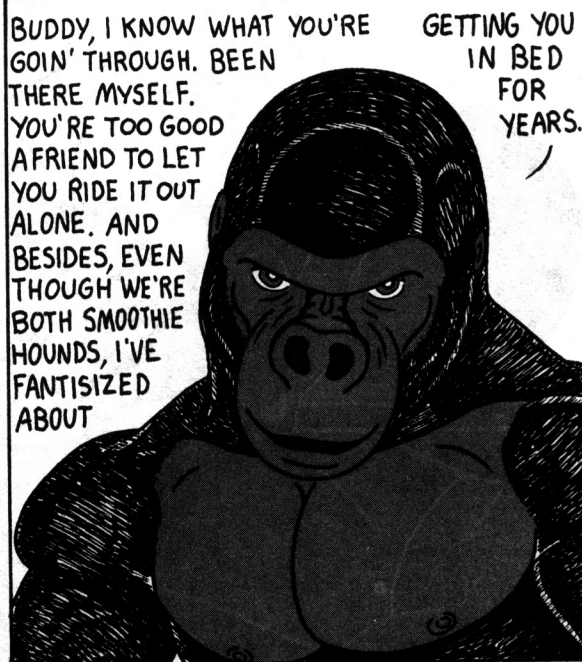


I'VE BEEN  
THINKIN'  
ABOUT YOU  
ALL DAY  
LOVER AN'  
I GOTTA  
TELL YA...



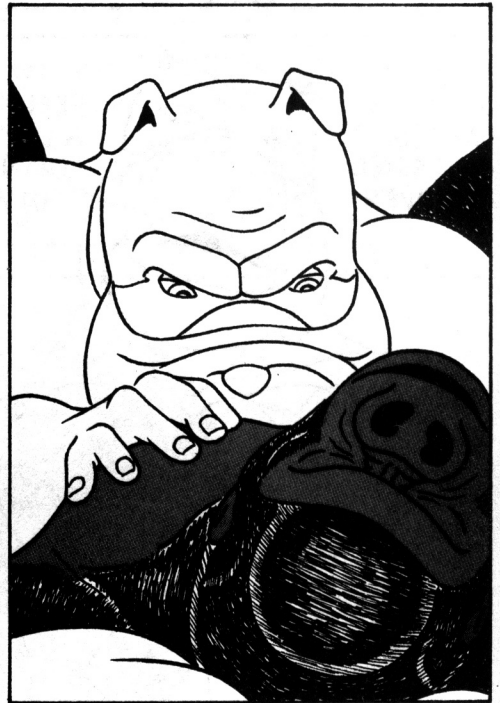
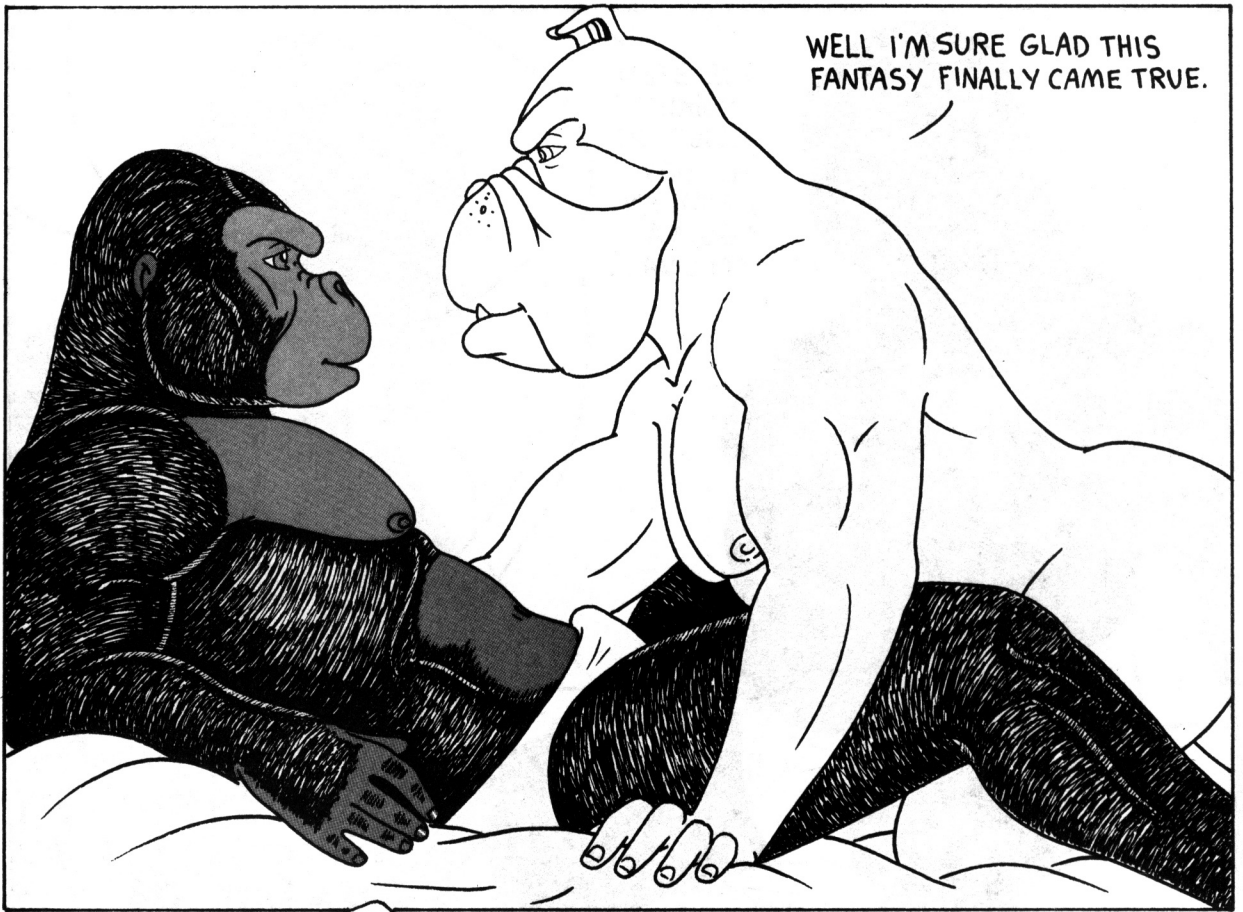
IT MEANS  
A LOT TO  
ME THAT  
YOU ASKED  
ME OVER.

YOU'VE MADE ME  
FEEL A HELL OF  
A LOT BETTER  
THAN I HAVE  
IN A LONG  
TIME.

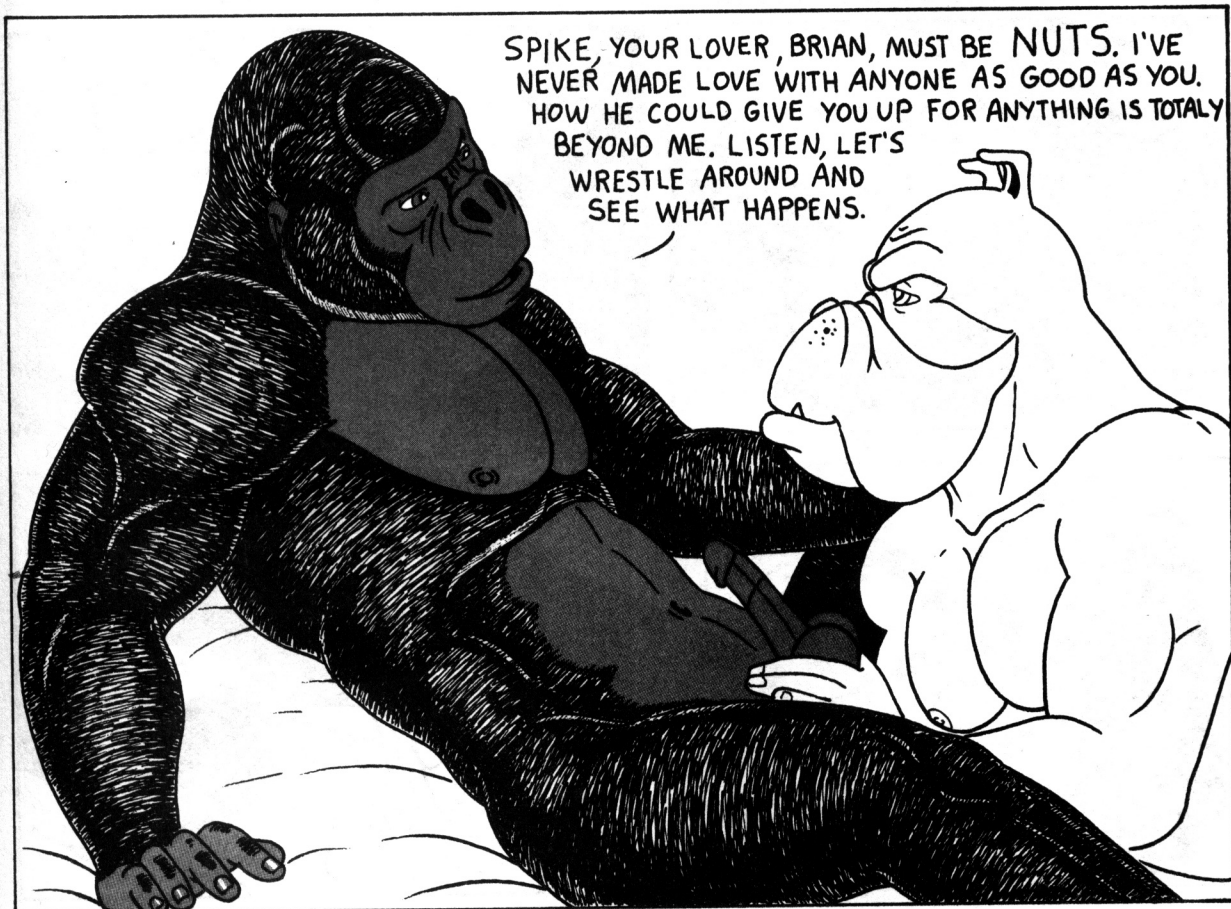


BUDDY, I KNOW WHAT YOU'RE  
GOIN' THROUGH. BEEN  
THERE MYSELF.  
YOU'RE TOO GOOD  
AFRIEND TO LET  
YOU RIDE IT OUT  
ALONE. AND  
BESIDES, EVEN  
THOUGH WE'RE  
BOTH SMOOTHIE  
HOUNDS, I'VE  
FANTISIZED  
ABOUT

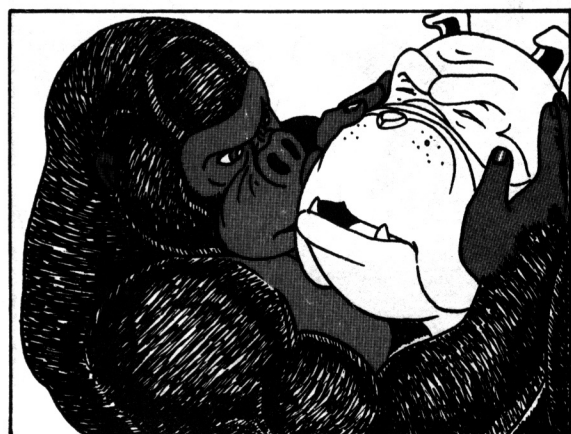
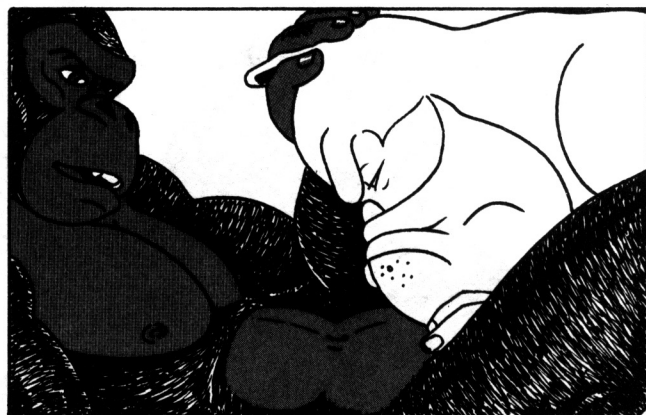
GETTING YOU  
IN BED  
FOR  
YEARS.

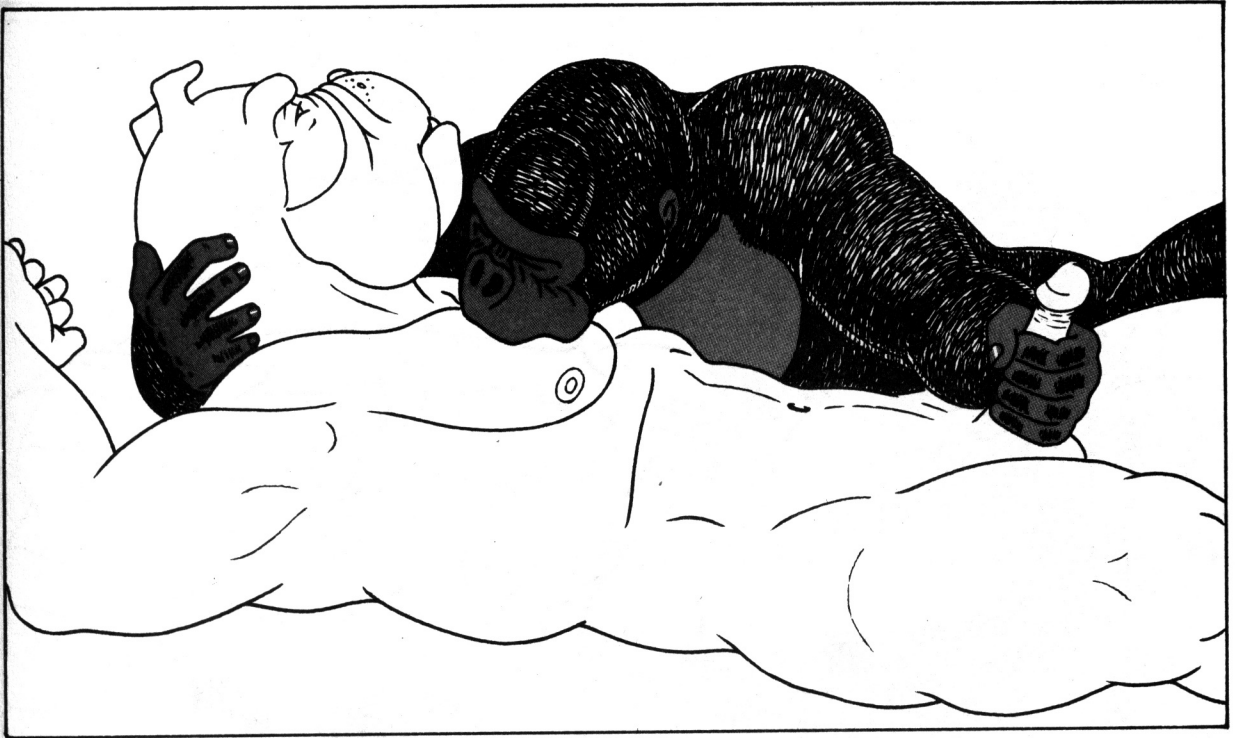






ANYTHING YOU SAY.





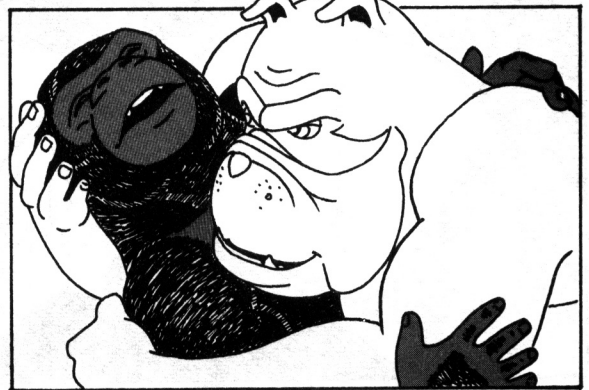
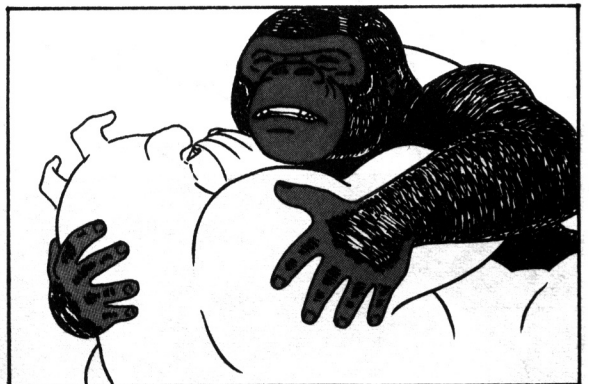


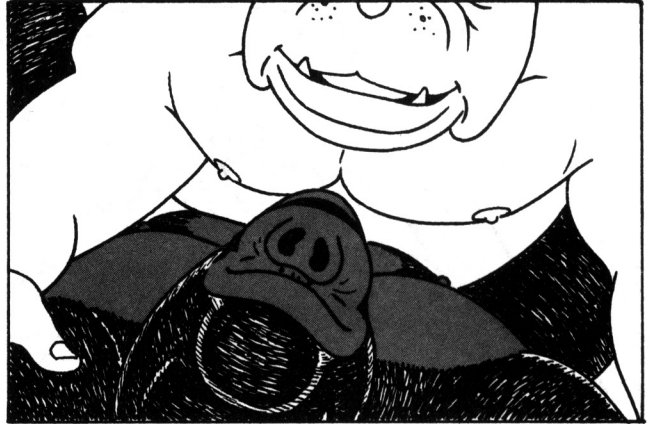


TIMEOUT, LOVER, TIMEOUT! YOU GOT ME REAL  
CLOSE AN' I WANT A CHANCE TO WRESTLE SOME  
MORE BEFORE I SHOOT MY FIRST LOAD.



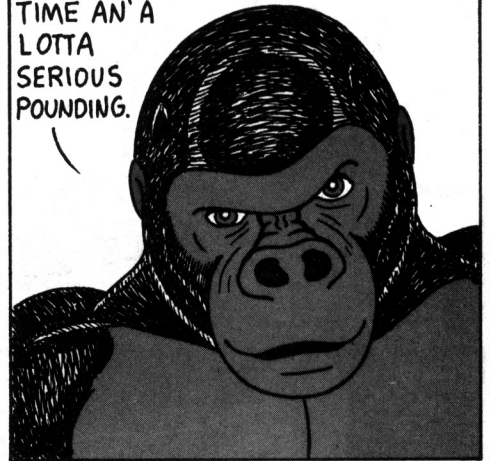
O.K.!



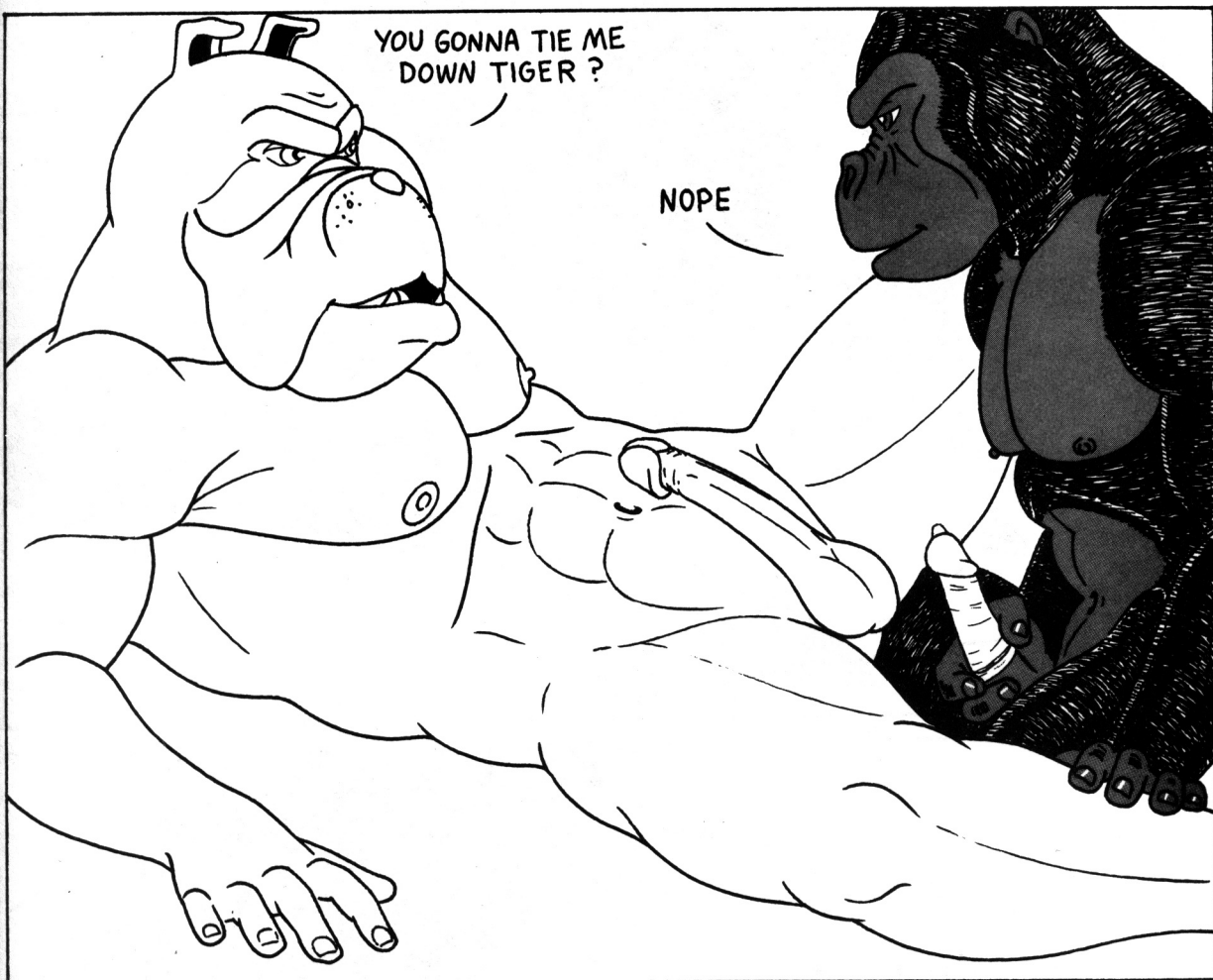


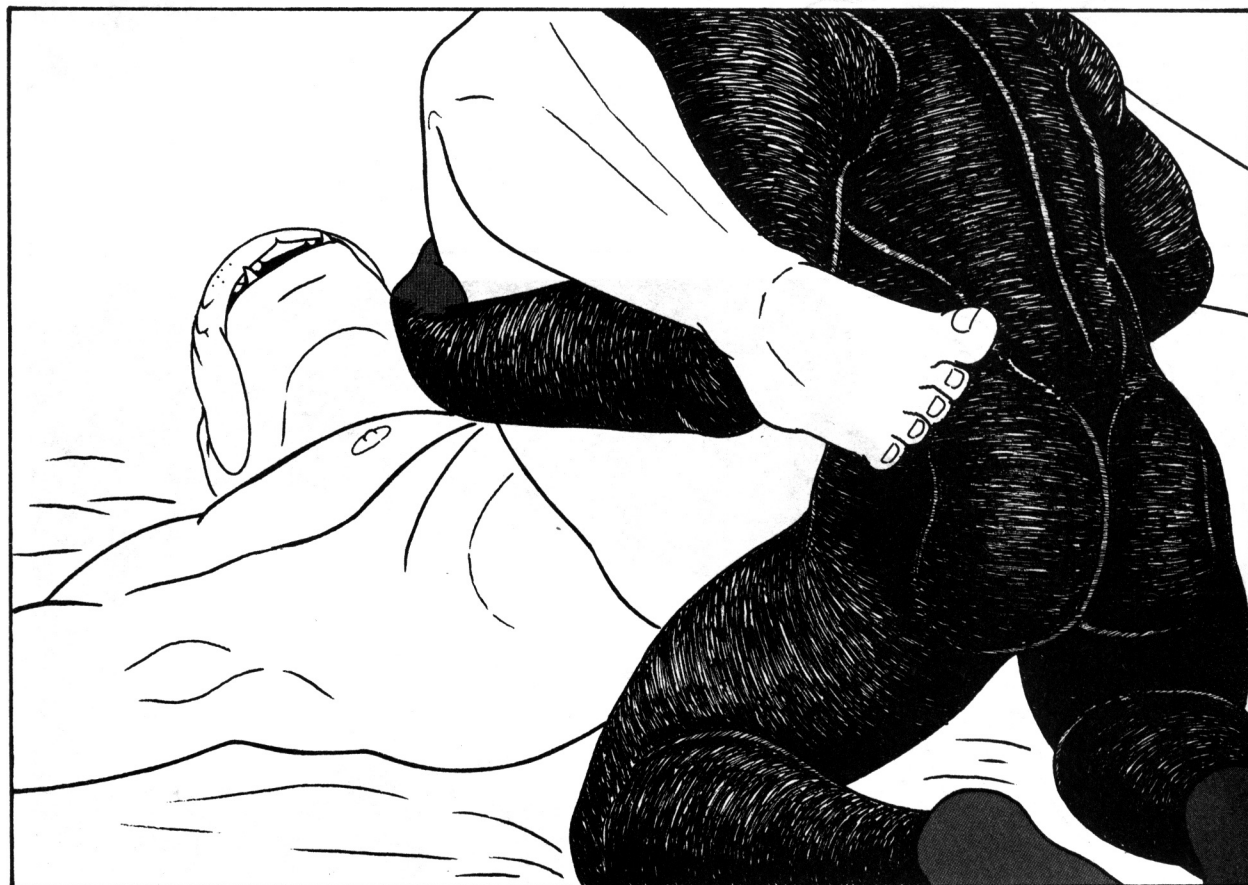
I WIN THE FIRST  
TUSSELE. MY CALL.  
I WANT YOU TO  
FUCK ME WITHIN  
AN INCH OF MY  
LIFE !

LOVER, THAT COULD TAKE A LONG  
TIME AN' A  
LOTTA  
SERIOUS  
POUNDING.

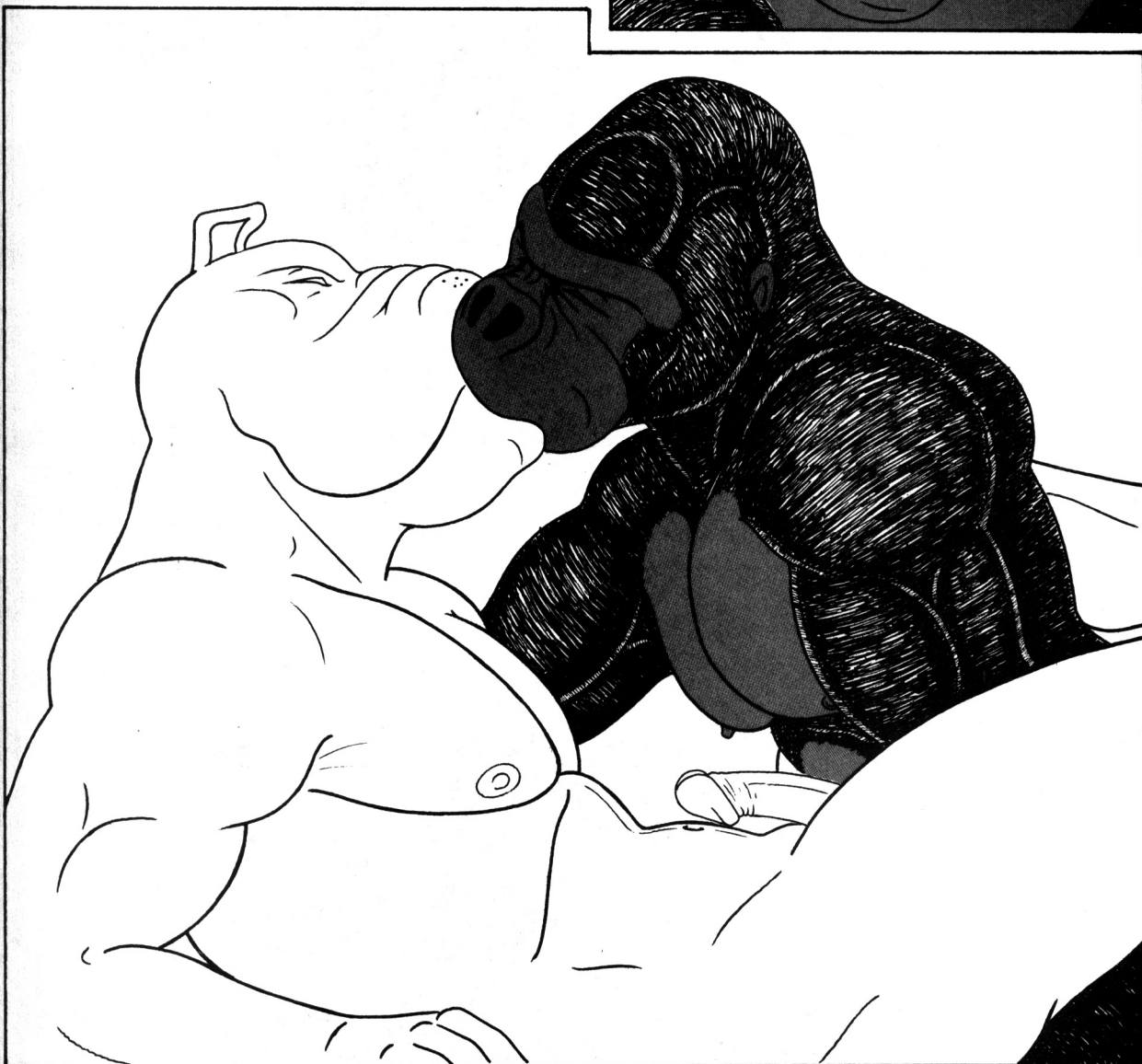
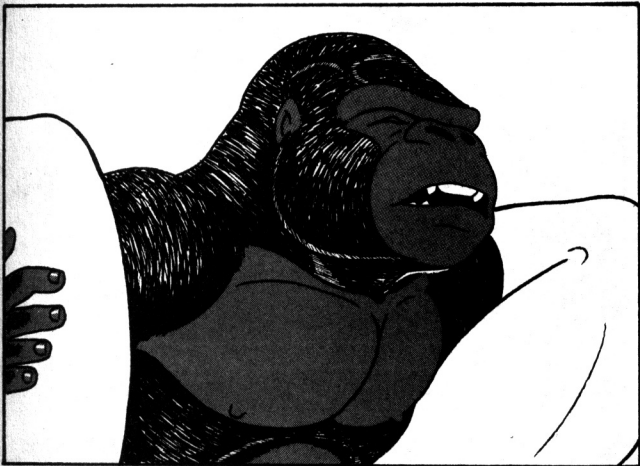


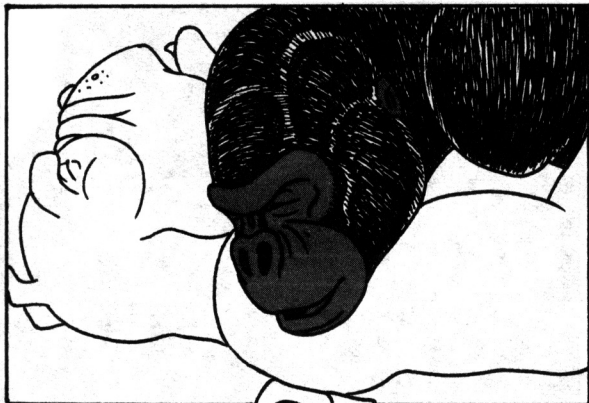
IT BETTER !











**AFTEREARTH** 

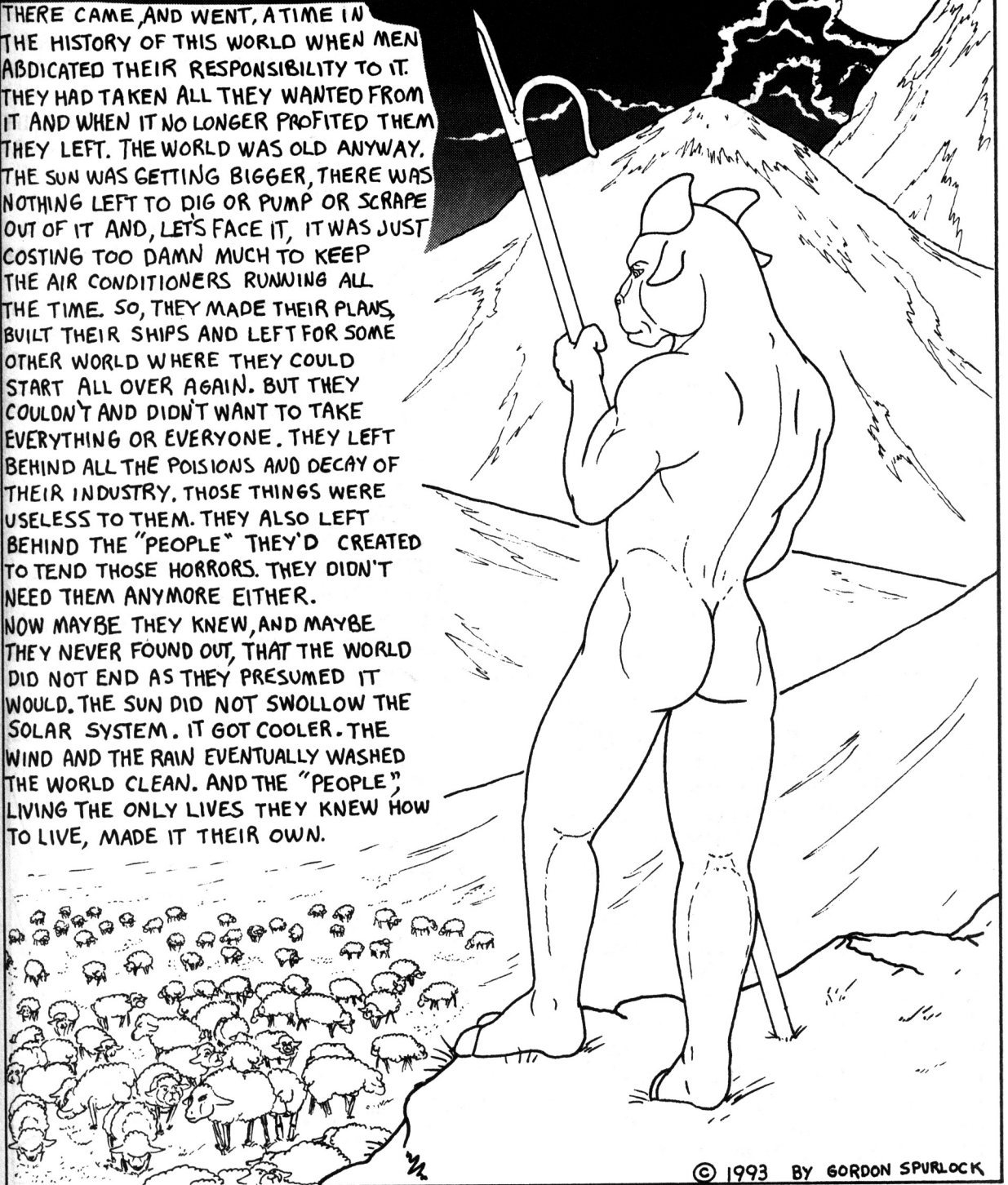




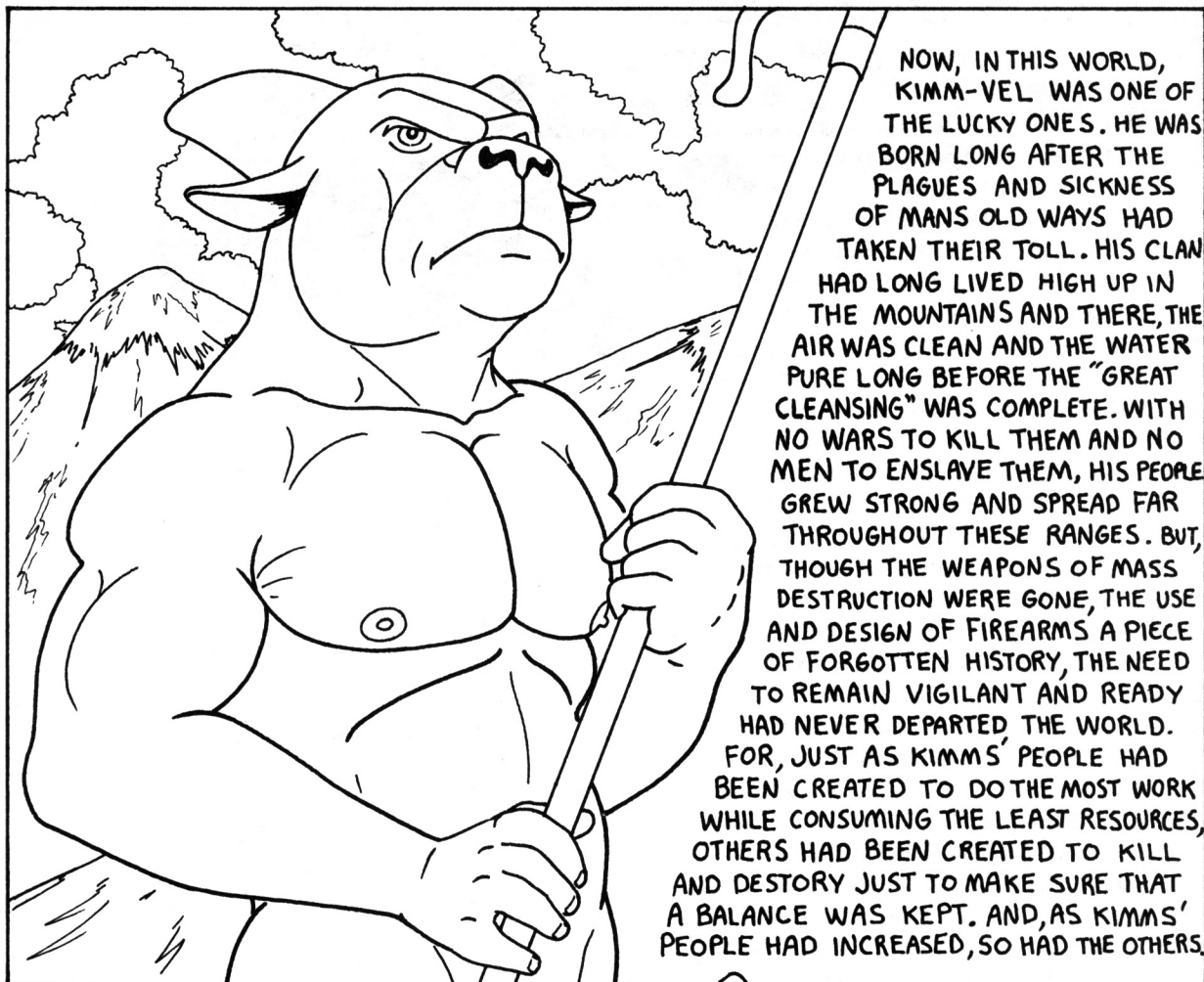
# AFTEREARTH

AQ

THERE CAME, AND WENT, A TIME IN THE HISTORY OF THIS WORLD WHEN MEN ABDICATED THEIR RESPONSIBILITY TO IT. THEY HAD TAKEN ALL THEY WANTED FROM IT AND WHEN IT NO LONGER PROFITED THEM THEY LEFT. THE WORLD WAS OLD ANYWAY. THE SUN WAS GETTING BIGGER, THERE WAS NOTHING LEFT TO DIG OR PUMP OR SCRAPE OUT OF IT AND, LET'S FACE IT, IT WAS JUST COSTING TOO DAMN MUCH TO KEEP THE AIR CONDITIONERS RUNNING ALL THE TIME. SO, THEY MADE THEIR PLANS, BUILT THEIR SHIPS AND LEFT FOR SOME OTHER WORLD WHERE THEY COULD START ALL OVER AGAIN. BUT THEY COULDN'T AND DIDN'T WANT TO TAKE EVERYTHING OR EVERYONE. THEY LEFT BEHIND ALL THE POISONS AND DECAY OF THEIR INDUSTRY. THOSE THINGS WERE USELESS TO THEM. THEY ALSO LEFT BEHIND THE "PEOPLE" THEY'D CREATED TO TEND THOSE HORRORS. THEY DIDN'T NEED THEM ANYMORE EITHER. NOW MAYBE THEY KNEW, AND MAYBE THEY NEVER FOUND OUT, THAT THE WORLD DID NOT END AS THEY PRESUMED IT WOULD. THE SUN DID NOT SWALLOW THE SOLAR SYSTEM. IT GOT COOLER. THE WIND AND THE RAIN EVENTUALLY WASHED THE WORLD CLEAN. AND THE "PEOPLE," LIVING THE ONLY LIVES THEY KNEW HOW TO LIVE, MADE IT THEIR OWN.



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NOW, IN THIS WORLD, KIMM-VEL WAS ONE OF THE LUCKY ONES. HE WAS BORN LONG AFTER THE PLAGUES AND SICKNESS OF MANS OLD WAYS HAD TAKEN THEIR TOLL. HIS CLAN HAD LONG LIVED HIGH UP IN THE MOUNTAINS AND THERE, THE AIR WAS CLEAN AND THE WATER PURE LONG BEFORE THE "GREAT CLEANSING" WAS COMPLETE. WITH NO WARS TO KILL THEM AND NO MEN TO ENSLAVE THEM, HIS PEOPLE GREW STRONG AND SPREAD FAR THROUGHOUT THESE RANGES. BUT, THOUGH THE WEAPONS OF MASS DESTRUCTION WERE GONE, THE USE AND DESIGN OF FIREARMS A PIECE OF FORGOTTEN HISTORY, THE NEED TO REMAIN VIGILANT AND READY HAD NEVER DEPARTED THE WORLD. FOR, JUST AS KIMMS' PEOPLE HAD BEEN CREATED TO DO THE MOST WORK WHILE CONSUMING THE LEAST RESOURCES, OTHERS HAD BEEN CREATED TO KILL AND DESTROY JUST TO MAKE SURE THAT A BALANCE WAS KEPT. AND, AS KIMMS' PEOPLE HAD INCREASED, SO HAD THE OTHERS.

ON THIS PARTICULAR DAY KIMM WAS NOT HAPPY. A FEW DAYS BEFORE BOTH A FRIEND AND HIS YOUNGER BROTHER HAD EATEN THE WRONG MUSHROOMS AND BECAME VIOLENTLY ILL. THEY NEEDED ATTENTION. KIMM VOLUNTEERED TO STAY AND WATCH THE FLOCK WHILE HIS LOVER, GOTAN-SUD, ESCORTED AND HELPED THEM BACK DOWN THE LONG MOUNTAIN TRAIL TO THEIR VILLAGE. THIS WAS NOT GOOD! ONE WAS TOO FEW TO PROTECT THE FLOCK FROM THOSE WHO RAVAGED THEIR NUMBER EVEN WITH THE FOUR OF THEM KEEPING GUARD. KIMM KNEW UNFRIENDLY EYES WERE WATCHING HIM AND WOULD USE THIS OPPORTUNITY.





HE WAS NOT WRONG. THE WOLFPACK HAD ONLY JUST REALIZED HIS PREDICAMENT, BUT THERE WAS NO HURRY. THE NIGHT WOULD COME SOON ENOUGH.

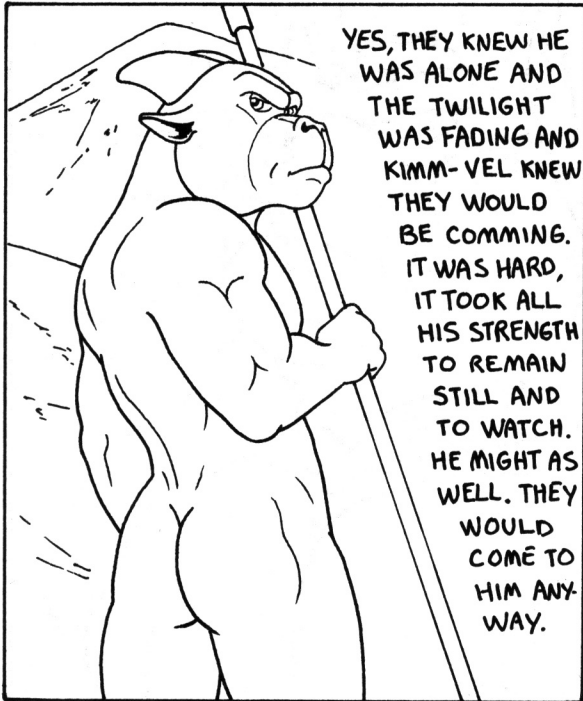


THEIR GROUP LEADER WAS KREEG. HE WAS WELL KNOWN AND FEARED ACROSS A GREAT DISTANCE. HIS OWN PACK WERE TERRIFIED OF HIM AND WERE GLAD HE'D NEVER TAKEN A MATE. AT LEAST THERE WOULDN'T BE ANY MORE LIKE HIM.

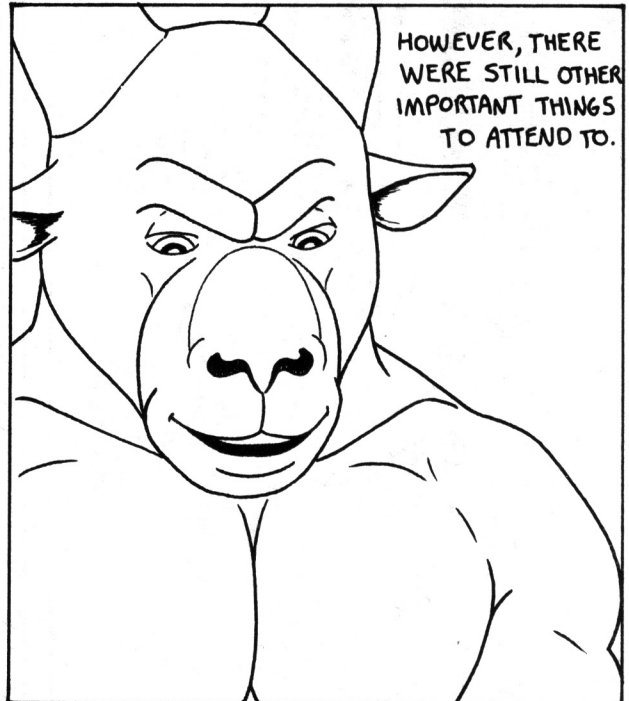
SOME WERE HUNGRY AND GRUMBLED. WHY WAIT? TEN AGAINST ONE. THEY COULD KILL HIM AND HERD ALL THE SHEEP BACK TO THEIR LAIR.



"AND PRECISELY WHY WERE THERE ONLY TEN WOLVES OUT OF THIRTEEN IN THE ORIGINAL HUNTING PARTY? DIDN'T THE RAM ON THE HILL GET ONE OF US? IF YOU'RE IN SUCH A HURRY, GO ON OUT THERE AND KILL HIM. OTHERWISE, SHUT UP!" THERE WAS SOME WIMPERING, THEN QUIET.



YES, THEY KNEW HE WAS ALONE AND THE TWILIGHT WAS FADING AND KIMM-VEL KNEW THEY WOULD BE COMING. IT WAS HARD, IT TOOK ALL HIS STRENGTH TO REMAIN STILL AND TO WATCH. HE MIGHT AS WELL. THEY WOULD COME TO HIM ANYWAY.



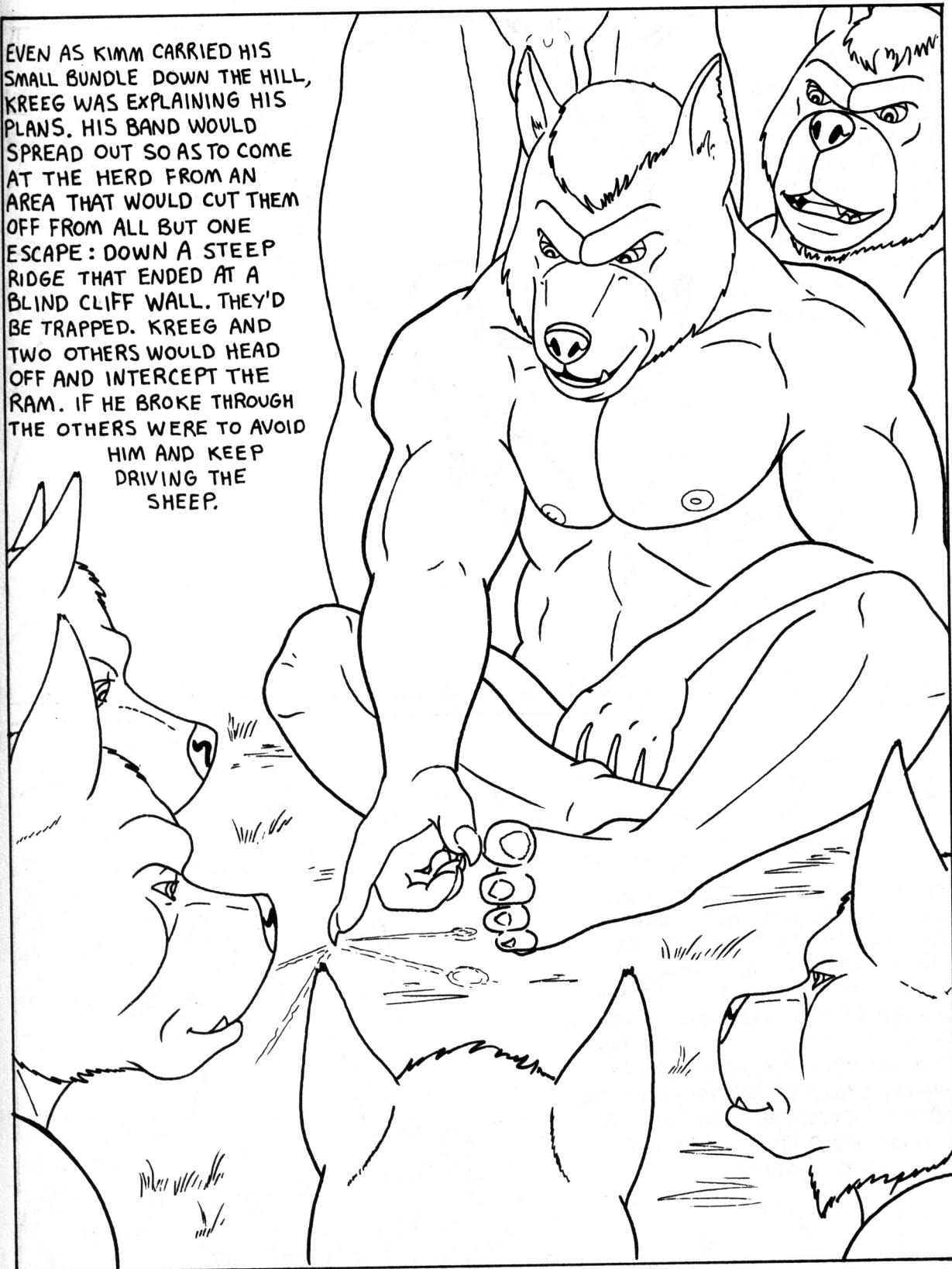
HOWEVER, THERE WERE STILL OTHER IMPORTANT THINGS TO ATTEND TO.



"SOOO, AND HOW DID YOU FIND YOUR WAY UP HERE, FUZZBALL? WHY DO YOU ALWAYS CRY SO MUCH AFTER YOU WANDER OFF? YOU DON'T KNOW WHAT'S GOING TO HAPPEN DO YOU? WELL, THERE'S NO REASON WHY YOU HAVE TO BE AFRAID NOW. LET'S GO FIND YOUR MAMA MIGHT AS WELL ENJOY WHAT'S LEFT OF A FINE EVENING WHILE WE CAN, EH?"



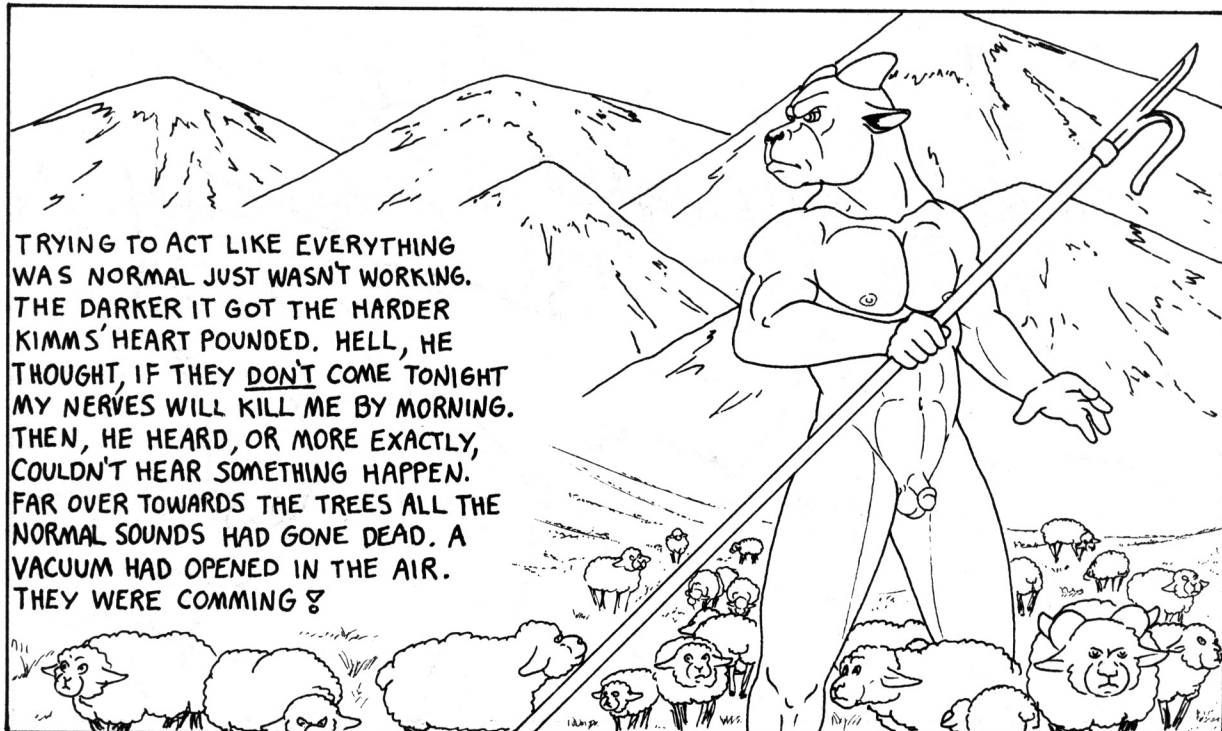
EVEN AS KIMM CARRIED HIS SMALL BUNDLE DOWN THE HILL, KREEG WAS EXPLAINING HIS PLANS. HIS BAND WOULD SPREAD OUT SO AS TO COME AT THE HERD FROM AN AREA THAT WOULD CUT THEM OFF FROM ALL BUT ONE ESCAPE: DOWN A STEEP RIDGE THAT ENDED AT A BLIND CLIFF WALL. THEY'D BE TRAPPED. KREEG AND TWO OTHERS WOULD HEAD OFF AND INTERCEPT THE RAM. IF HE BROKE THROUGH THE OTHERS WERE TO AVOID HIM AND KEEP DRIVING THE SHEEP.

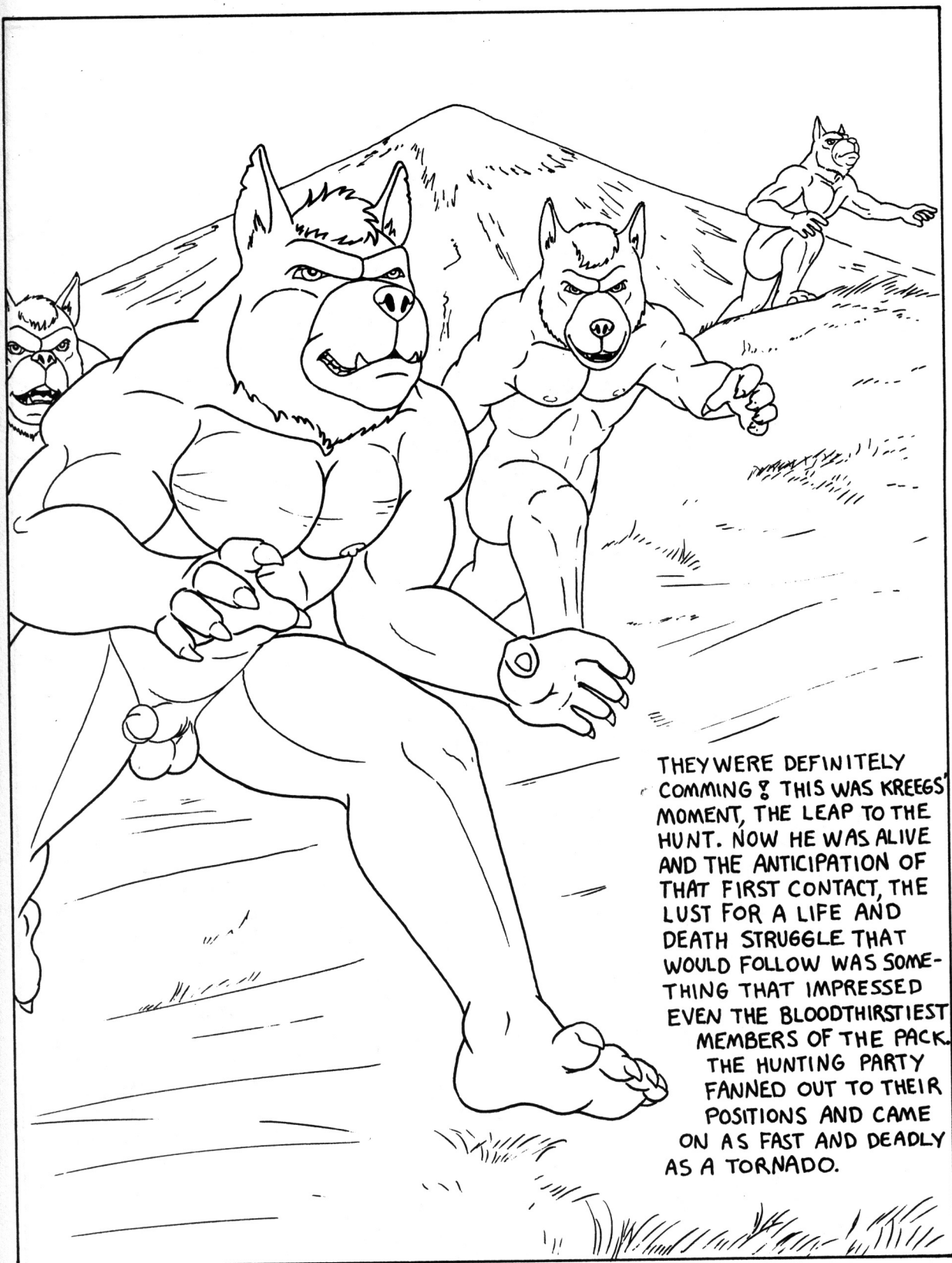


AND ONE OTHER  
THING ALL HAD  
BETTER REMEMBER.  
THE RAM IS MINE &  
I WANT HIM AND I'LL  
HAVE HIM ALIVE.  
WHATEVER HAPPENS,  
LEAVE HIM TO ME. IF  
ANYONE SCREWS UP  
AND KILLS HIM I'LL  
RIP THEIR THROATS  
OUT &

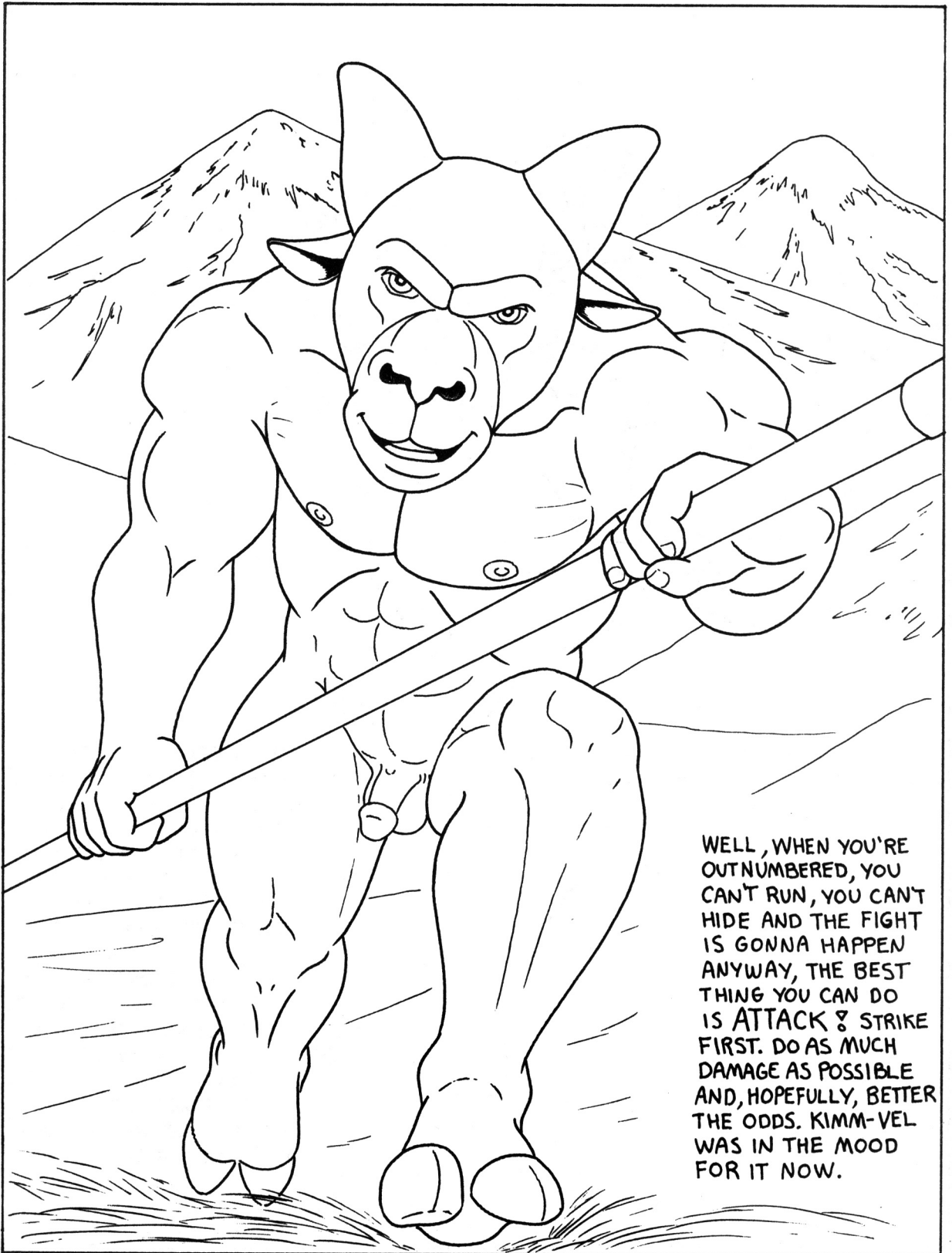


TRYING TO ACT LIKE EVERYTHING  
WAS NORMAL JUST WASN'T WORKING.  
THE DARKER IT GOT THE HARDER  
KIMMS' HEART POUNDED. HELL, HE  
THOUGHT, IF THEY DON'T COME TONIGHT  
MY NERVES WILL KILL ME BY MORNING.  
THEN, HE HEARD, OR MORE EXACTLY,  
COULDN'T HEAR SOMETHING HAPPEN.  
FAR OVER TOWARDS THE TREES ALL THE  
NORMAL SOUNDS HAD GONE DEAD. A  
VACUUM HAD OPENED IN THE AIR.  
THEY WERE COMING &



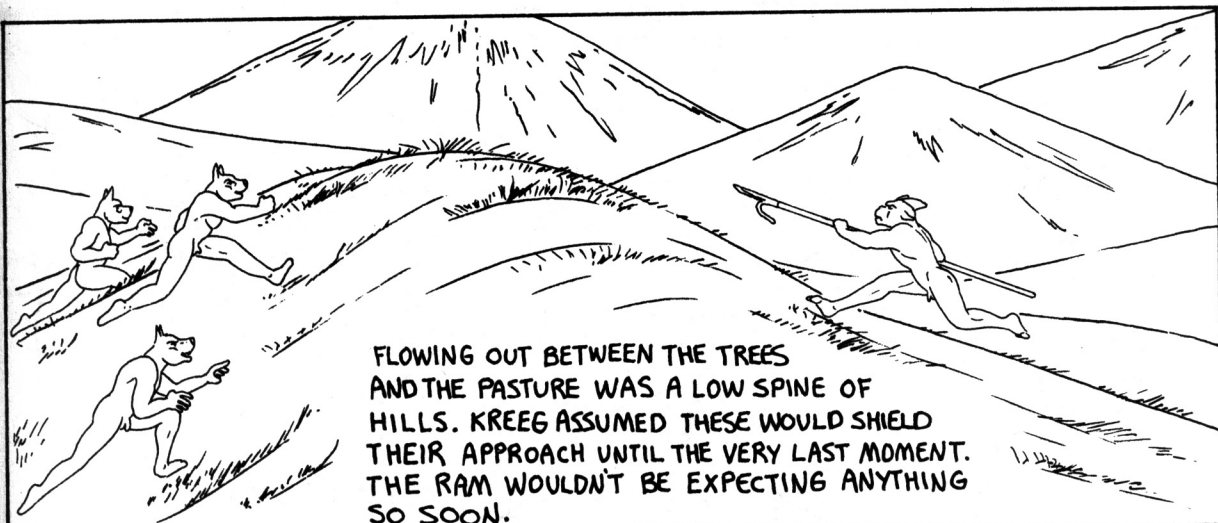


THEY WERE DEFINITELY COMING ! THIS WAS KREEG'S MOMENT, THE LEAP TO THE HUNT. NOW HE WAS ALIVE AND THE ANTICIPATION OF THAT FIRST CONTACT, THE LUST FOR A LIFE AND DEATH STRUGGLE THAT WOULD FOLLOW WAS SOMETHING THAT IMPRESSED EVEN THE BLOODTHIRSTIEST MEMBERS OF THE PACK. THE HUNTING PARTY FANNED OUT TO THEIR POSITIONS AND CAME ON AS FAST AND DEADLY AS A TORNADO.



WELL, WHEN YOU'RE OUTNUMBERED, YOU CAN'T RUN, YOU CAN'T HIDE AND THE FIGHT IS GONNA HAPPEN ANYWAY, THE BEST THING YOU CAN DO IS ATTACK & STRIKE FIRST. DO AS MUCH DAMAGE AS POSSIBLE AND, HOPEFULLY, BETTER THE ODDS. KIMM-VEL WAS IN THE MOOD FOR IT NOW.

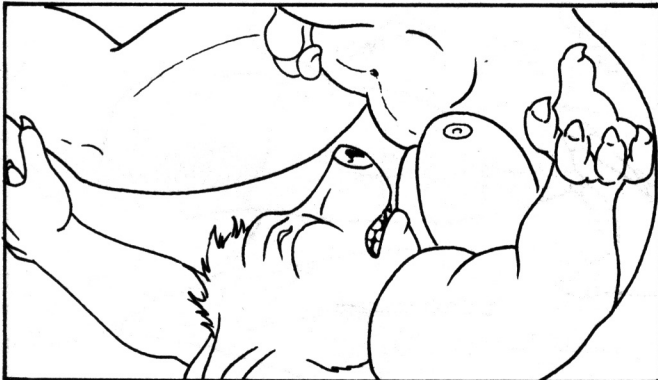
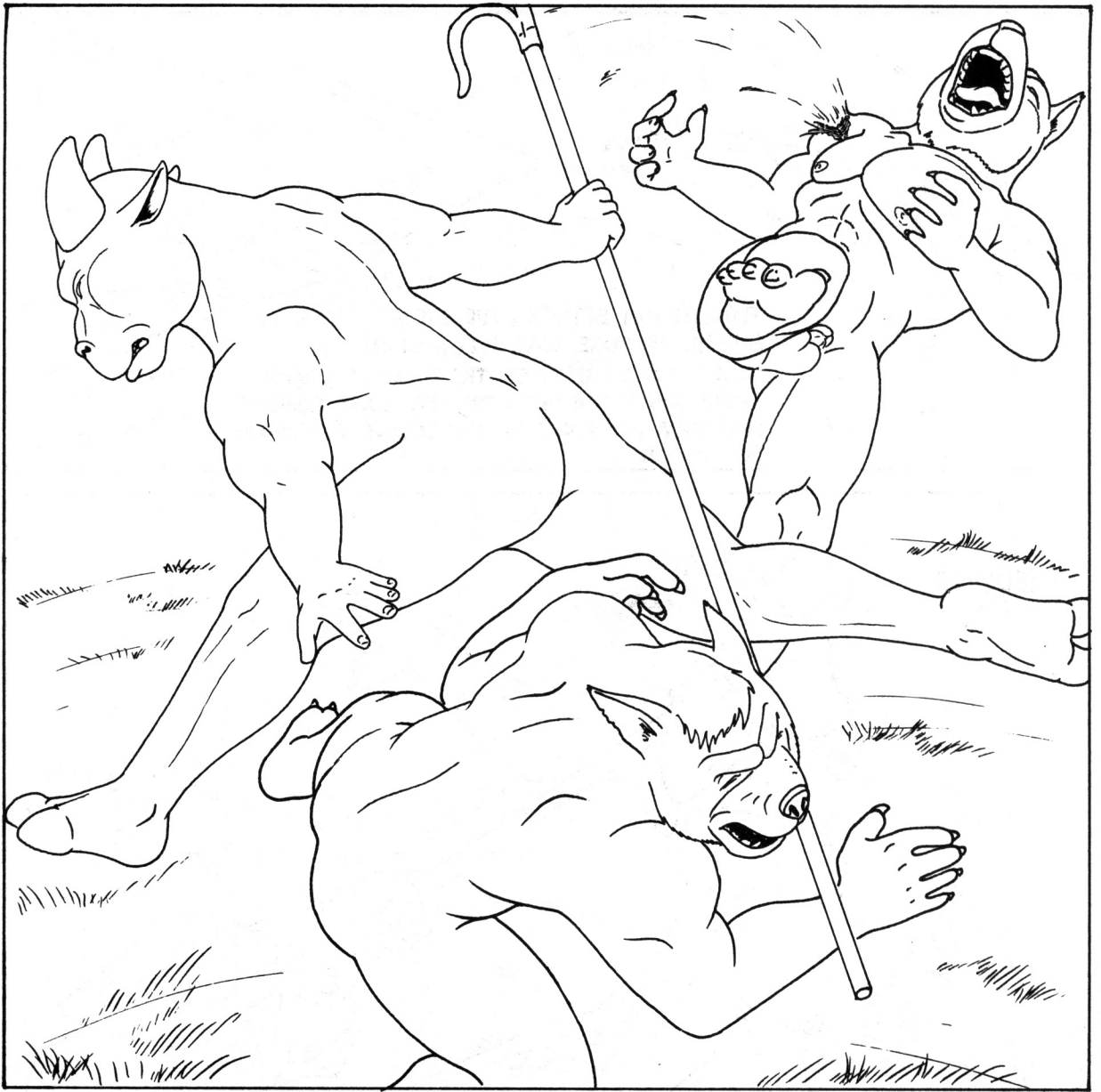




FLOWING OUT BETWEEN THE TREES  
AND THE PASTURE WAS A LOW SPINE OF  
HILLS. KREEG ASSUMED THESE WOULD SHIELD  
THEIR APPROACH UNTIL THE VERY LAST MOMENT.  
THE RAM WOULDN'T BE EXPECTING ANYTHING  
SO SOON.

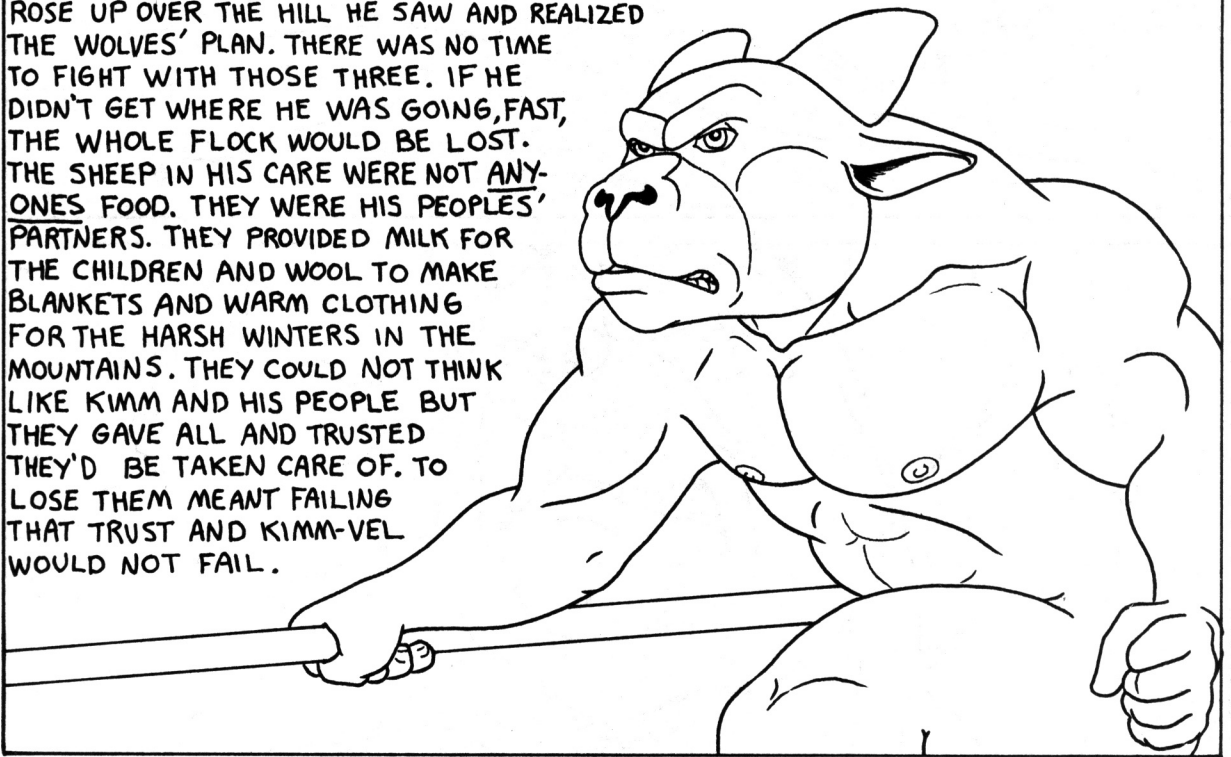
NEEDLESS  
TO SAY,







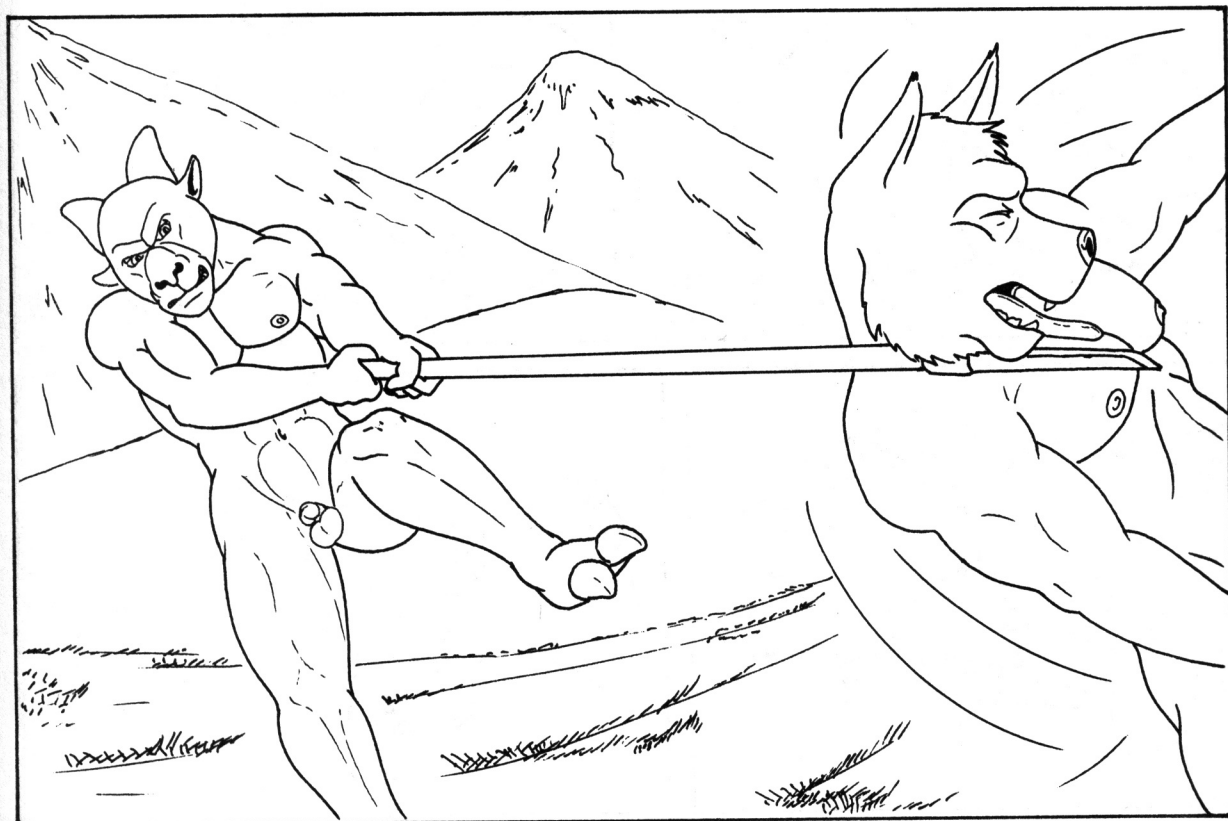
HARDLY A MOMENT AFTER KIMMS' HEAD ROSE UP OVER THE HILL HE SAW AND REALIZED THE WOLVES' PLAN. THERE WAS NO TIME TO FIGHT WITH THOSE THREE. IF HE DIDN'T GET WHERE HE WAS GOING, FAST, THE WHOLE FLOCK WOULD BE LOST. THE SHEEP IN HIS CARE WERE NOT ANY-ONES FOOD. THEY WERE HIS PEOPLES' PARTNERS. THEY PROVIDED MILK FOR THE CHILDREN AND WOOL TO MAKE BLANKETS AND WARM CLOTHING FOR THE HARSH WINTERS IN THE MOUNTAINS. THEY COULD NOT THINK LIKE KIMM AND HIS PEOPLE BUT THEY GAVE ALL AND TRUSTED THEY'D BE TAKEN CARE OF. TO LOSE THEM MEANT FAILING THAT TRUST AND KIMM-VEL WOULD NOT FAIL.

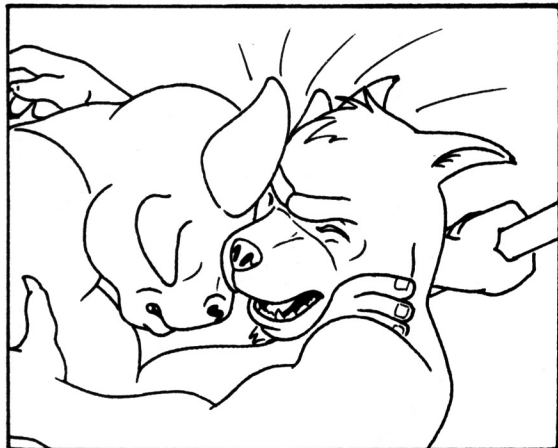
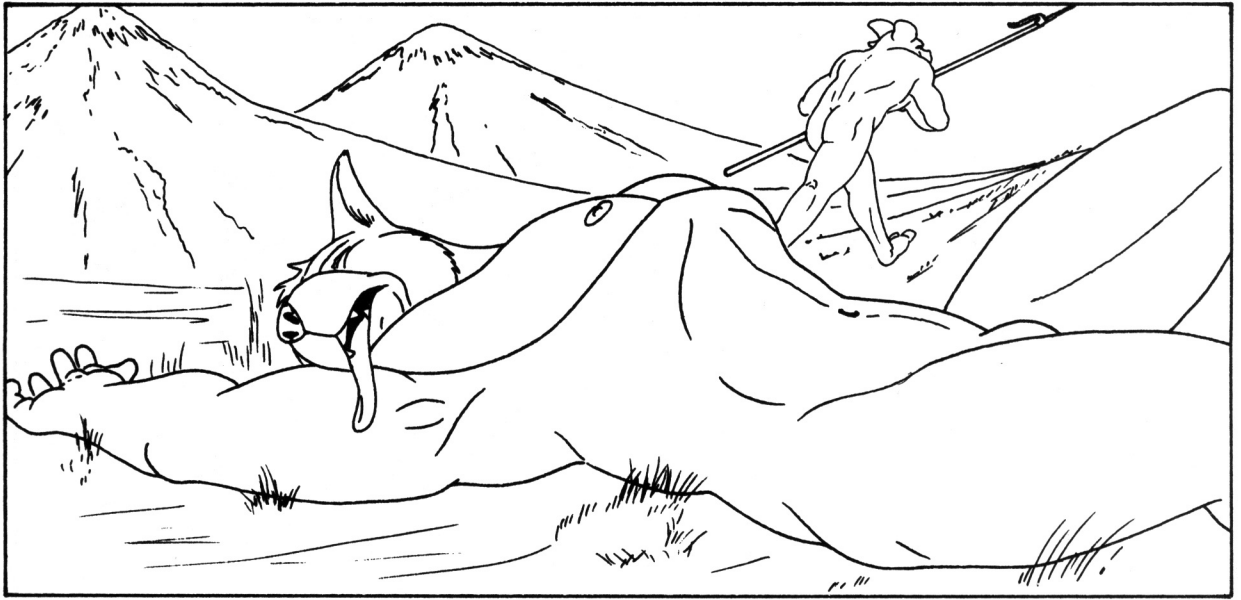


THE WOLVES WERE WIDELY SPREAD OUT, KIMM WOULD ONLY NEED TO GET PAST ONE OR TWO.







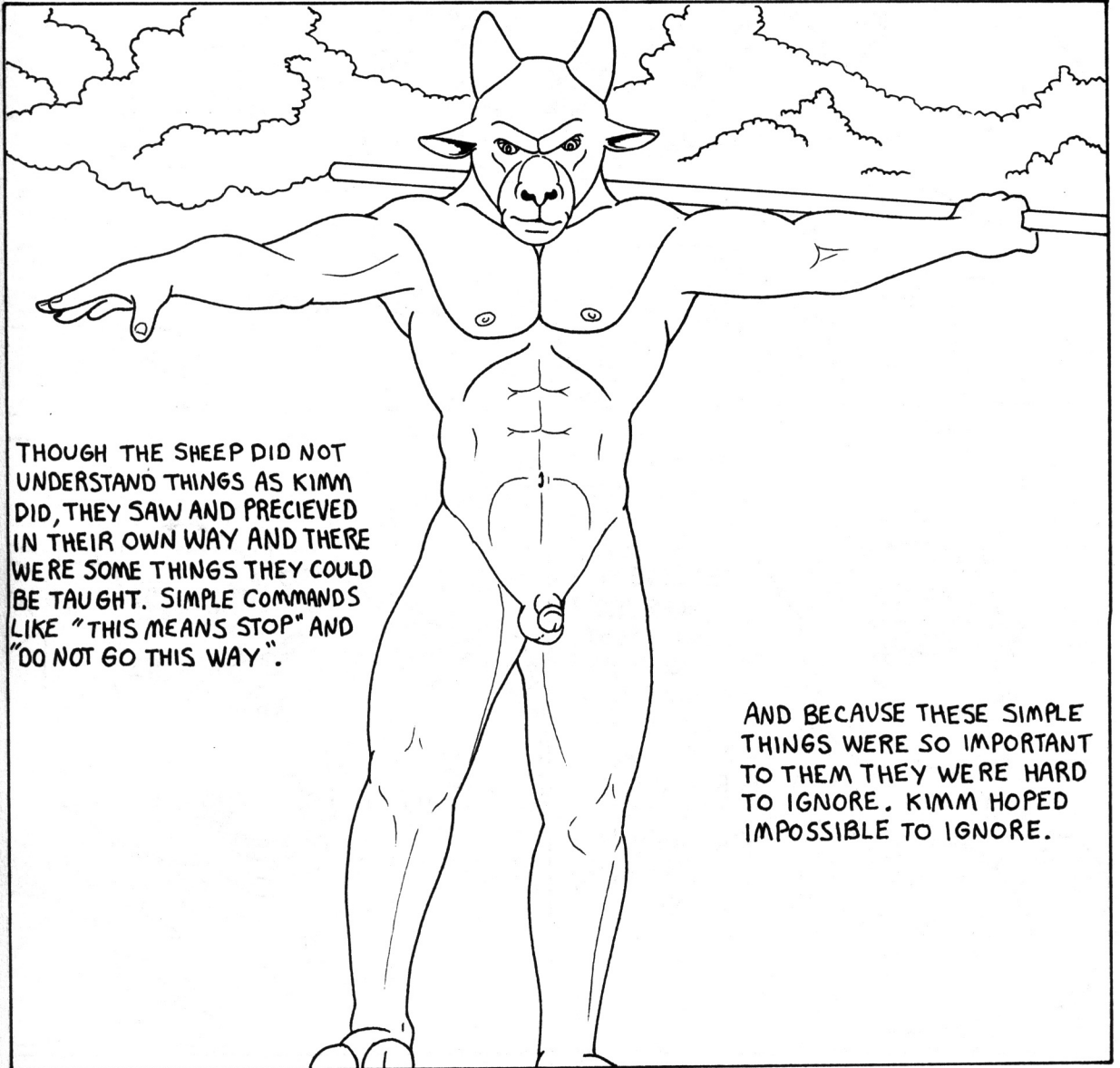


KIMM REACHED THE MOUTH OF THE PASS JUST MOMENTS BEFORE THE FLOCK. THE OTHER WOLVES SAW HIM NOW AND WERE SHRIEKING THEIR ANGER TO RUSH THE SHEEP FASTER. THERE WAS JUST ONE CHANCE.



THOUGH THE SHEEP DID NOT UNDERSTAND THINGS AS KIMM DID, THEY SAW AND PRECIEVED IN THEIR OWN WAY AND THERE WERE SOME THINGS THEY COULD BE TAUGHT. SIMPLE COMMANDS LIKE "THIS MEANS STOP" AND "DO NOT GO THIS WAY".

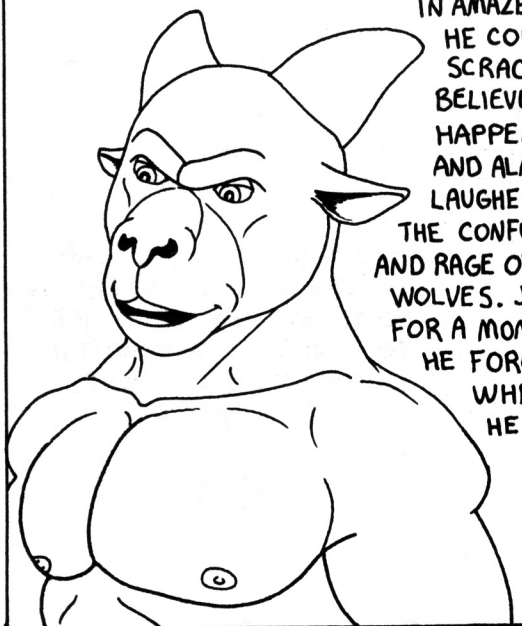
AND BECAUSE THESE SIMPLE THINGS WERE SO IMPORTANT TO THEM THEY WERE HARD TO IGNORE. KIMM HOPED IMPOSSIBLE TO IGNORE.



IT WORKED! THE SUDDEN SIGHT OF THEIR PROTECTOR DIRECTING THEM BACK WAS STRONGER THAN THEIR FEAR. THE FLOCK VEERED TO EITHER SIDE OF THE PASS AND SWARMED BACK DOWN PAST THE WOLVES. AND THOUGH A FEW WERE STILL LOST, THE REST CHARGED ON DOWN THE SLOPE OUT OF HARMS WAY.



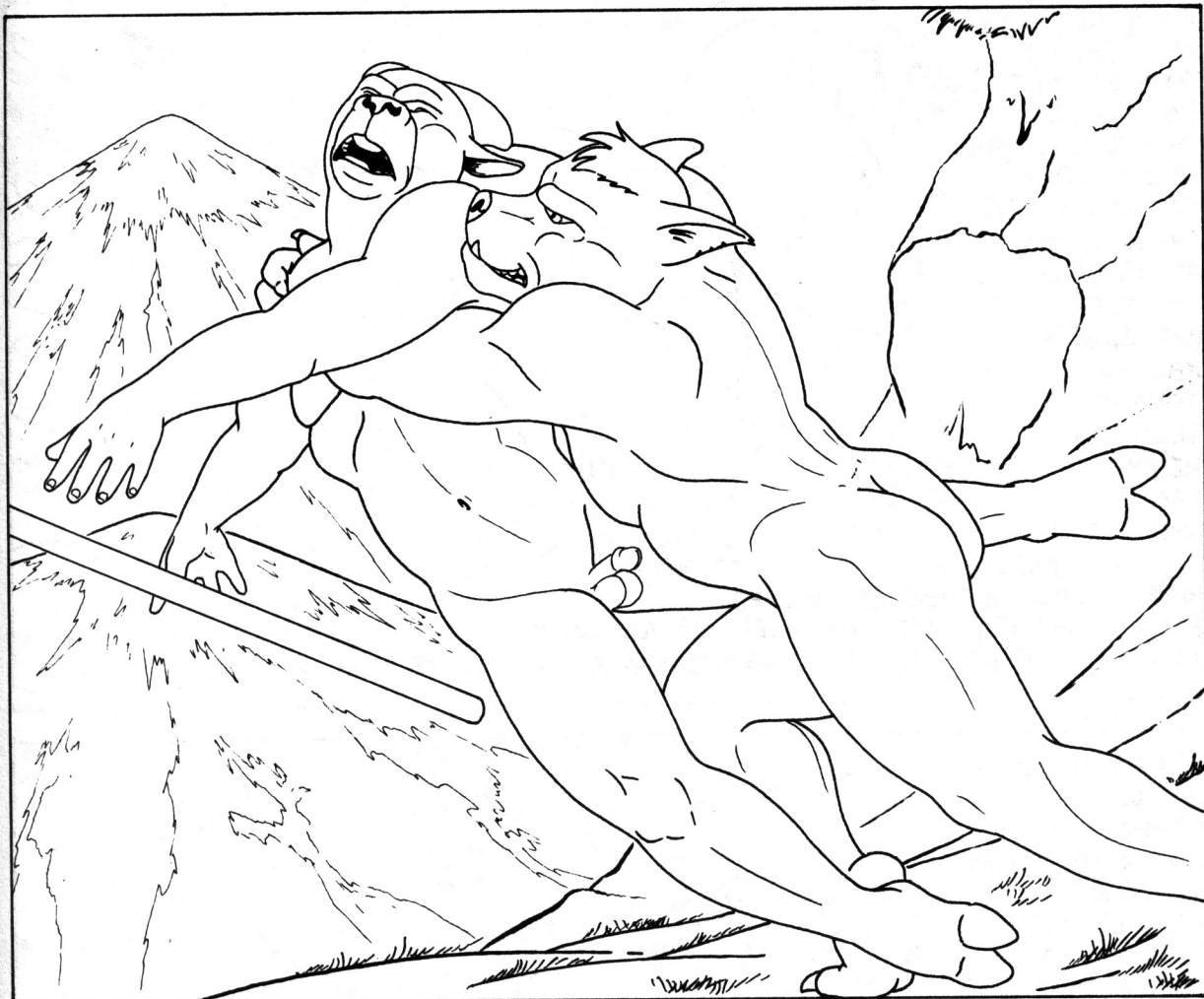
KIMM WATCHED IN AMAZEMENT. HE COULD SCARCELY BELIEVE IT HAPPENED AND ALMOST LAUGHED AT THE CONFUSION AND RAGE OF THE WOLVES. JUST FOR A MOMENT HE FORGOT WHERE HE WAS.



NEVER A GOOD THING TO DO.







KIMM AND THE BIG WOLF ROLLED TO A STOP AT THE HILLS BASE. OVERPOWERED AND STILL A LITTLE STUNNED HE FELT SHARP CLAWS AT HIS THROAT. THE OTHER WOLVES WERE RACING TOWARD THEM AND HE EXPECTED EACH BREATH TO BE HIS LAST.

THEN, A STRANGE THING HAPPENED. BEFORE THE OTHER WOLVES GOT TO THEM THE BIG WOLF GROWLED "IF YOU WANT TO SURVIVE THE HOUR, STOP FIGHTING AND PLAY ALONG WITH ME."



HE HAD NO IDEA WHAT THE WOLF MEANT BUT, GRABBING WHAT WAS LEFT OF HIS NERVE, WENT LIMP AND WAITED FOR WHATEVER WOULD HAPPEN. THE FIRST ONES THAT REACHED THEM TRIED TO KILL HIM OUT-RIGHT, SLASHING AND SNAPPING AT HIS THROAT. KREEG HAD TO BEAT THEM DOWN AND BLOODIED A FEW TO MAKE THEM BACK OFF. THEN, AS THE OTHERS STRAGGLED OVER TO THEM, HE BOUND KIMM UP AND KEPT A TIGHT HOLD ON THE CORDS TO KEEP HIM CLOSE.



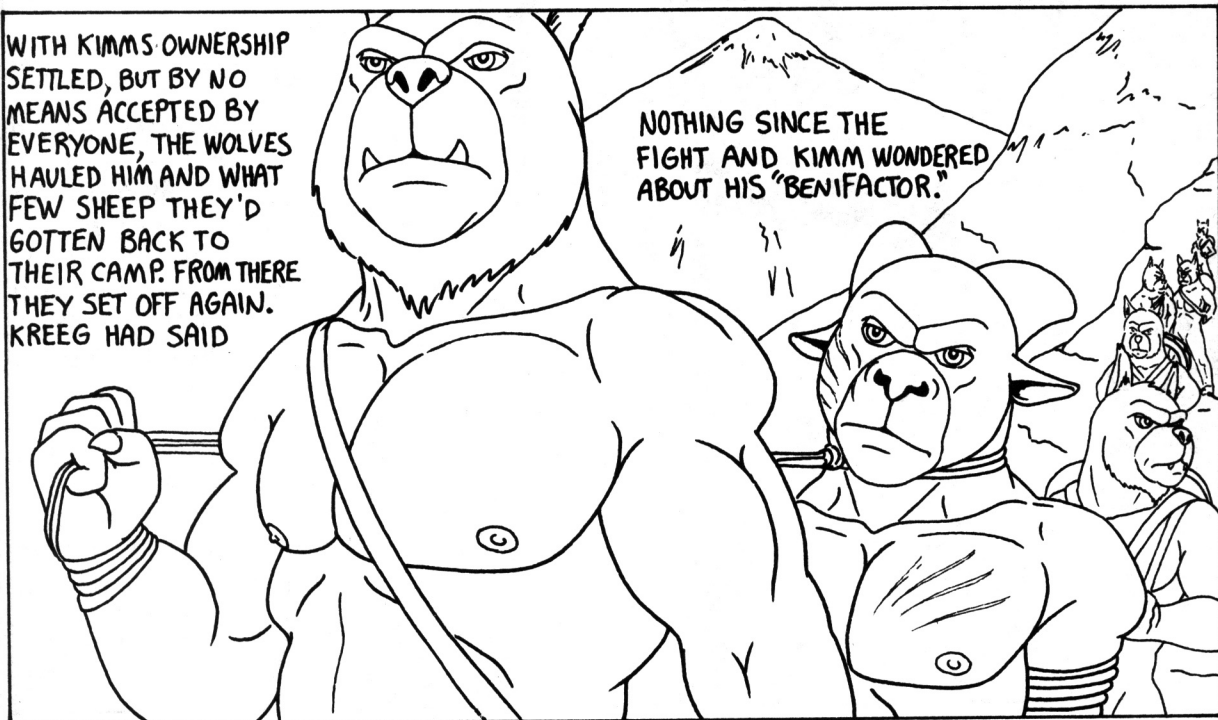
THE ARGUMENT THAT ENSUED WAS HELLISH!  
ONE WOLF WOUNDED, ONE DEAD WITH A BROKEN  
NECK. AT ONE POINT IT LOOKED LIKE THEY ALL  
WOULD ATTACK KREEG TO GET AT KIMM. FINALLY,  
THEY BACKED DOWN. THEY KNEW,

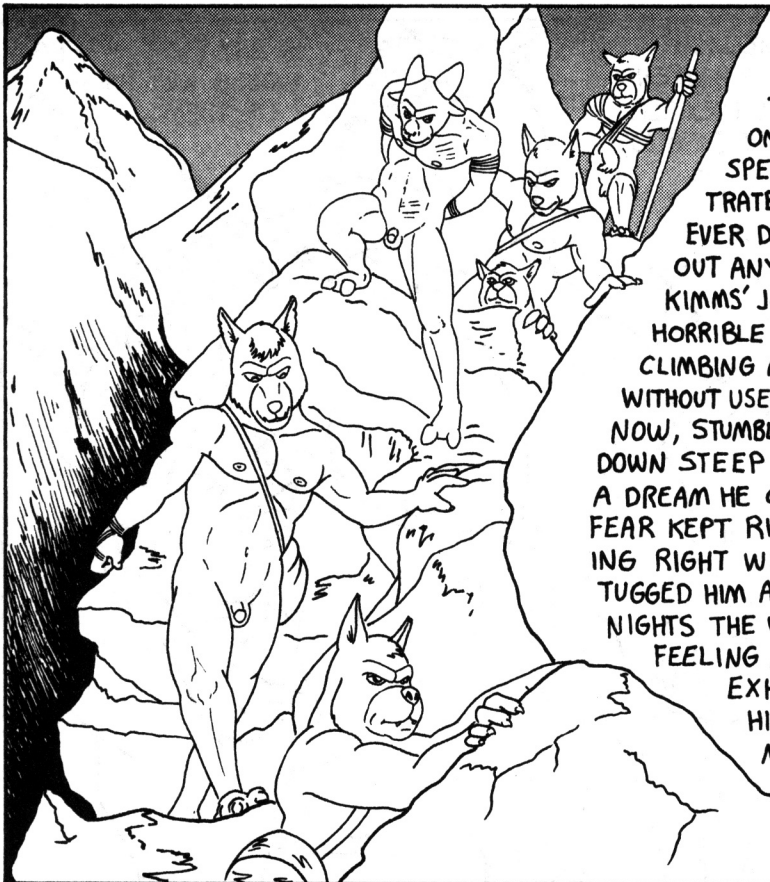
IN ANY FIGHT, KREEG  
WOULD KILL HALF  
OF THEM.



WITH KIMMS OWNERSHIP  
SETTLED, BUT BY NO  
MEANS ACCEPTED BY  
EVERYONE, THE WOLVES  
HAULED HIM AND WHAT  
FEW SHEEP THEY'D  
GOTTEN BACK TO  
THEIR CAMP. FROM THERE  
THEY SET OFF AGAIN.  
KREEG HAD SAID

NOTHING SINCE THE  
FIGHT AND KIMM WONDERED  
ABOUT HIS "BENIFACTOR."





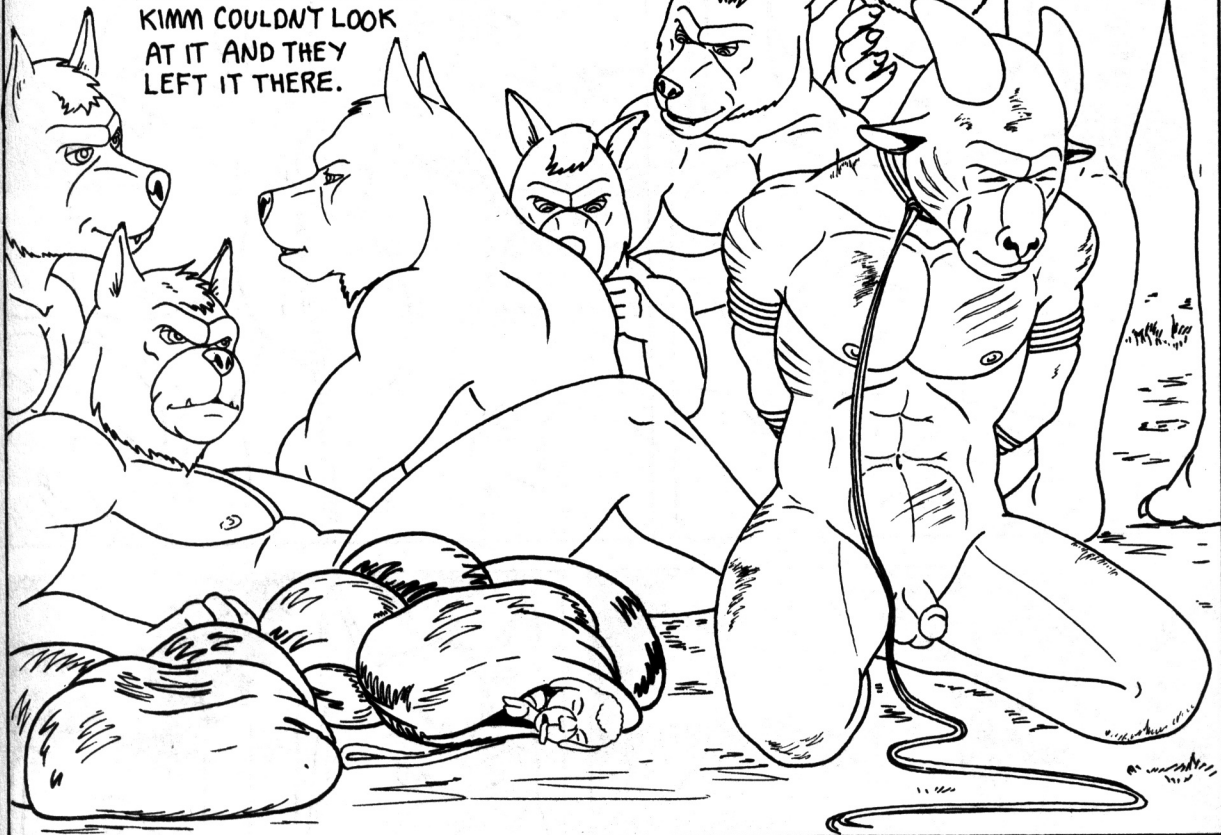
THE WOLVES MOVED FAST AND VERY SOON TOOK KIMM OUT OF ALL THE TERRITORY HE WAS FAMILIAR WITH. ON THE TRAIL THE WOLVES DID NOT SPEAK MUCH. THEY SEEMED TO CONCENTRATE, SINGLE MINDFULLY, ON REACHING WHAT EVER DESTINATION THEY SET OUT FOR. WITHOUT ANY IDEA WHAT HIS FATE WAS TO BE, KIMMS' JOURNEY BEGAN TO FEEL LIKE SOME HORRIBLE NIGHTMARE. RUNNING, WALKING, CLIMBING AND STRUGGLING UP ROCKY SLOPES WITHOUT USE OF HIS ARMS TO ASSIST HIM, AND NOW, STUMBLING, SLIPPING AND SOMETIMES FALLING DOWN STEEP LEDGES, DEEPER AND DEEPER INTO A DREAM HE COULDN'T WAKE UP FROM. TERRIBLE FEAR KEPT RISING UP INTO HIS THROAT AND STICKING RIGHT WHERE KREEGS' TETHER PULLED AND TUGGED HIM ALONG. FOR TWO WHOLE DAYS AND NIGHTS THE WOLVES DID NOT STOP AND KIMM, FEELING MORE AND MORE HUNGRY AND EXHAUSTED FROM HIS BINDINGS AND HIS FALLS, BEGAN TO THINK HE'D MADE A BIG MISTAKE IN "PLAYING ALONG" WITH KREEGS' "GAME" RATHER THEN LETTING THE OTHER WOLVES KILL HIM RIGHT OFF.



FINALLY, IN THE EARLY EVENING OF THE THIRD DAY, THEY MARCHED OUT OF THE FOOTHILLS ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE MOUNTAINS KIMM KNEW AND INTO THE THICKEST DARKEST FORREST HE'D EVER SEEN. TOO WORN OUT EVEN TO CARE ABOUT DEATH ANYMORE HE FOCUSED ON THE COOL GREEN DAMPNESS THAT WASHED OVER HIM AND KEPT IN STEP WITH THE OTHERS.

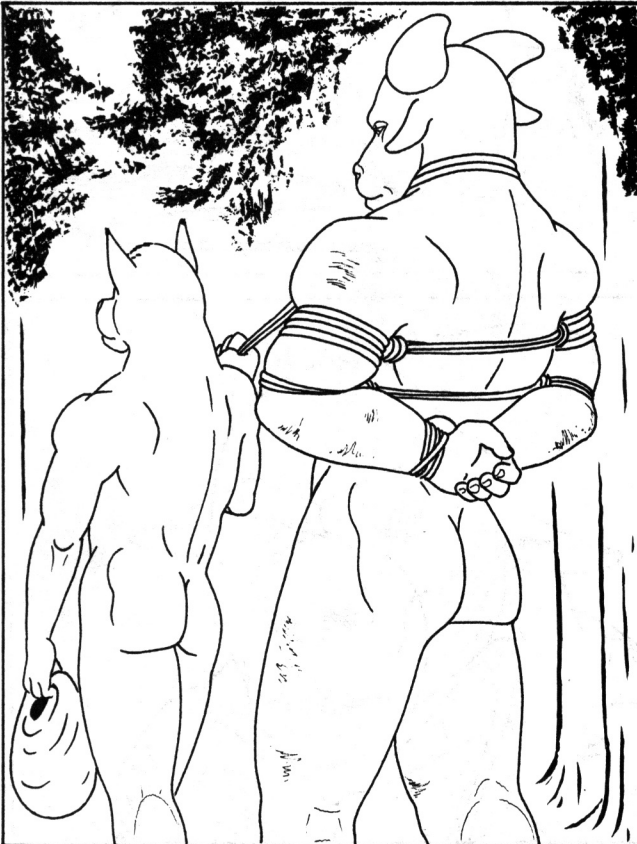


AT LONG LAST THEY CAME TO A STOP IN A SMALL, WELL USED, CLEARING.  
KIMM SANK TO HIS KNEES, GRATEFULL FOR HIS FIRST CHANCE TO REST.  
KREEG LEFT HIM AND VANISHED INTO THE TREES  
WHILE THE OTHERS SHUFFLED ABOUT MAKING  
CAMP. BAGS WERE TOSSED ON THE GROUND  
AND ONE SPILLED ITS CONTENTS.  
KIMM COULDN'T LOOK  
AT IT AND THEY  
LEFT IT THERE.



KREEG  
FINALLY  
RETURNED  
CARRYING  
A BUNDLE

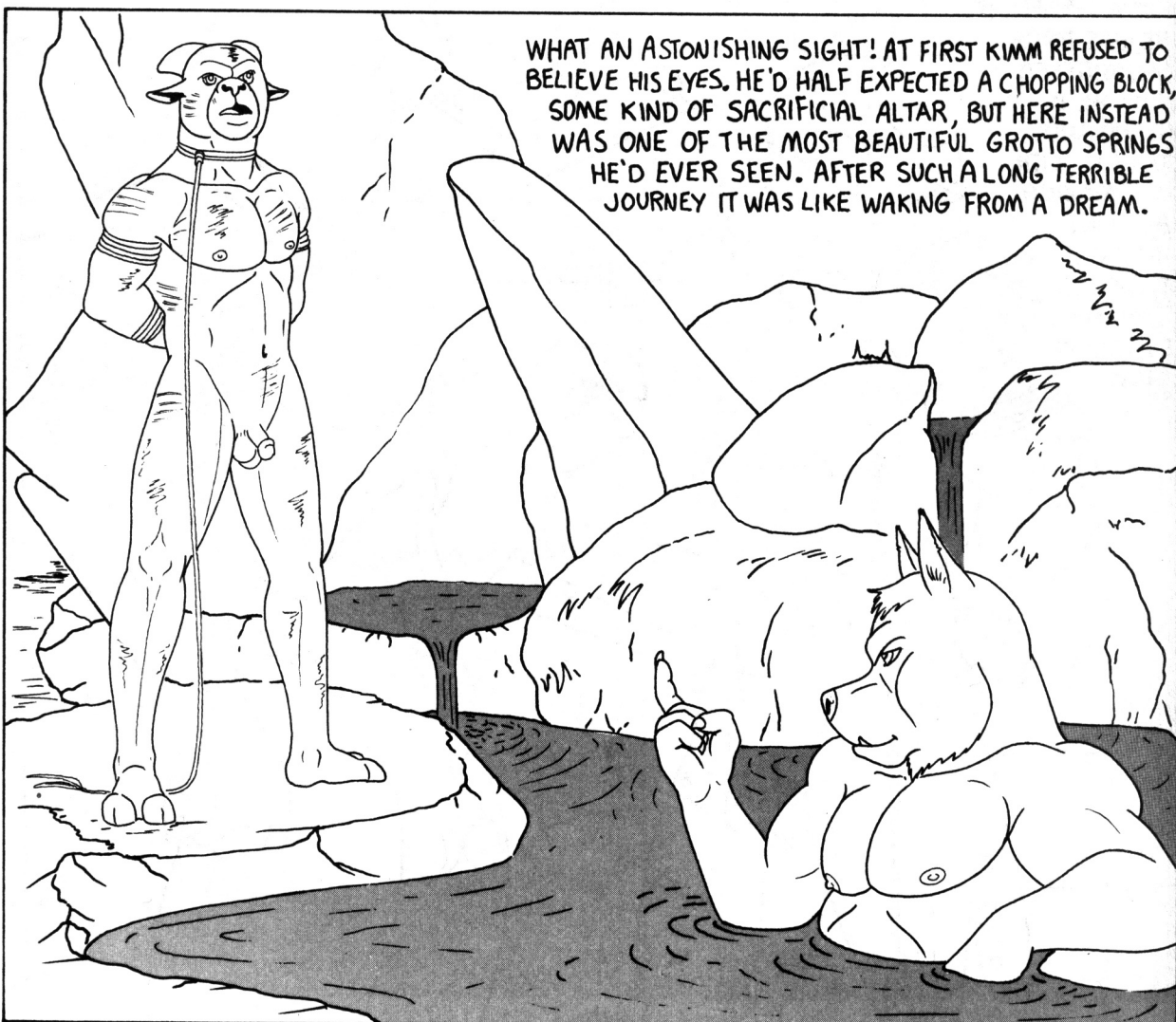






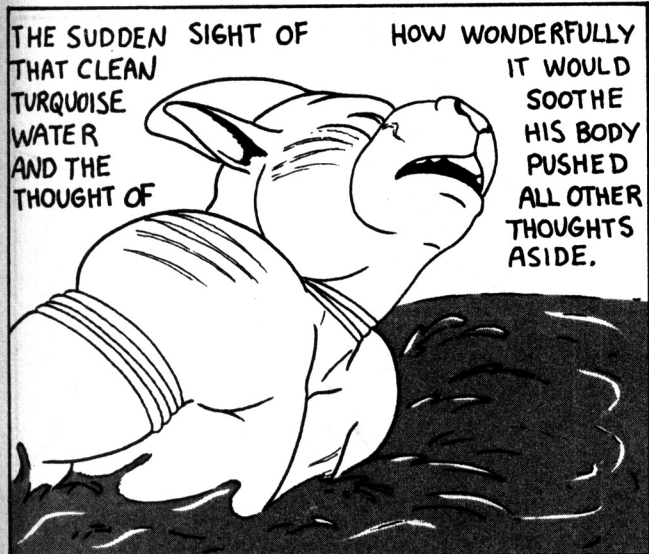
THEY WALKED FOR A LONG TIME AND FINALLY STOPPED AT AN OUTCROPING OF GRANITE SLABS THRUST UP OUT OF THE GROUND. KREEG DROPPED HIS LEASH AND TURNED. KIMM TENSED. IF HE WAS TO BE SLAUGHTERED NOW HE'D STAND AND TAKE IT WITHOUT MAKING A SOUND. KREEG JUST MOTIONED FOR KIMM TO FOLLOW HIM.

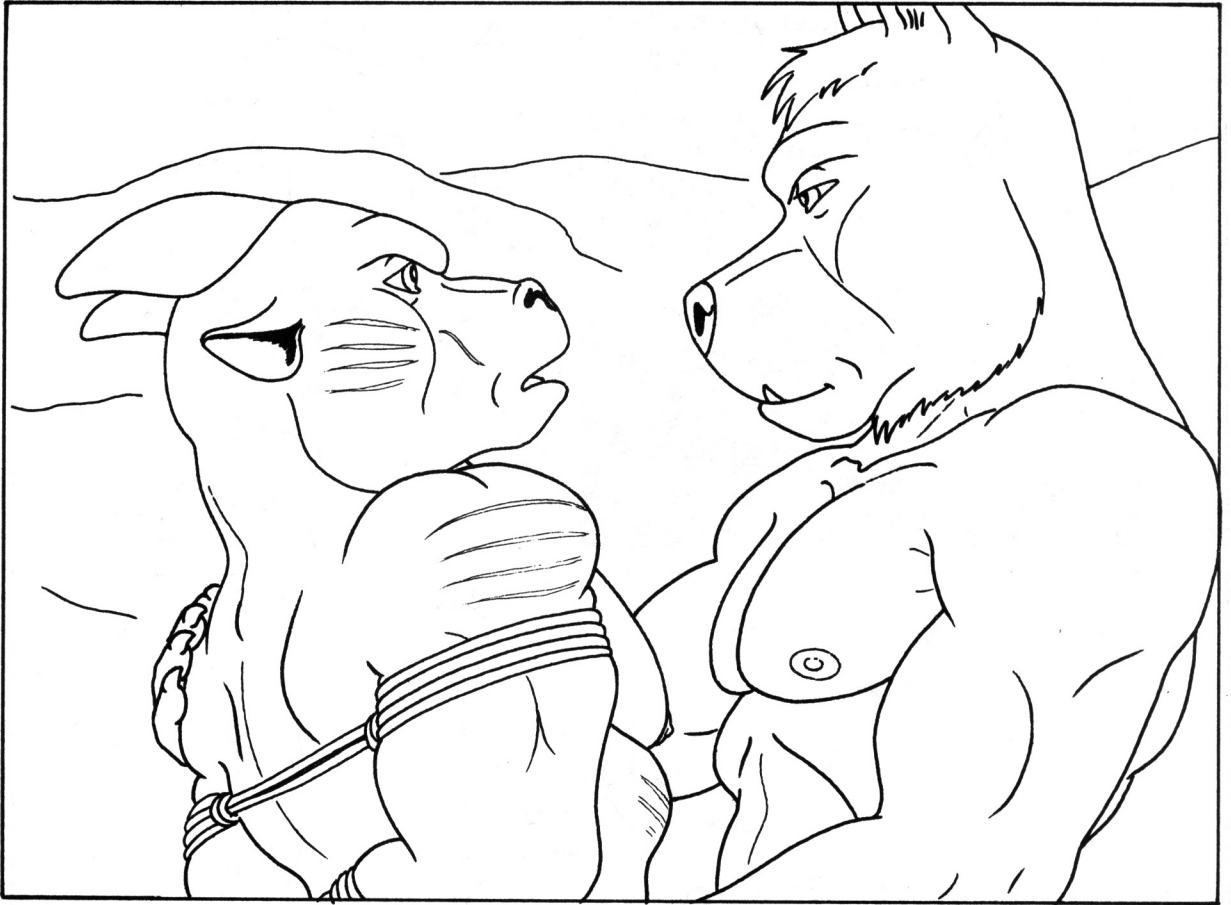


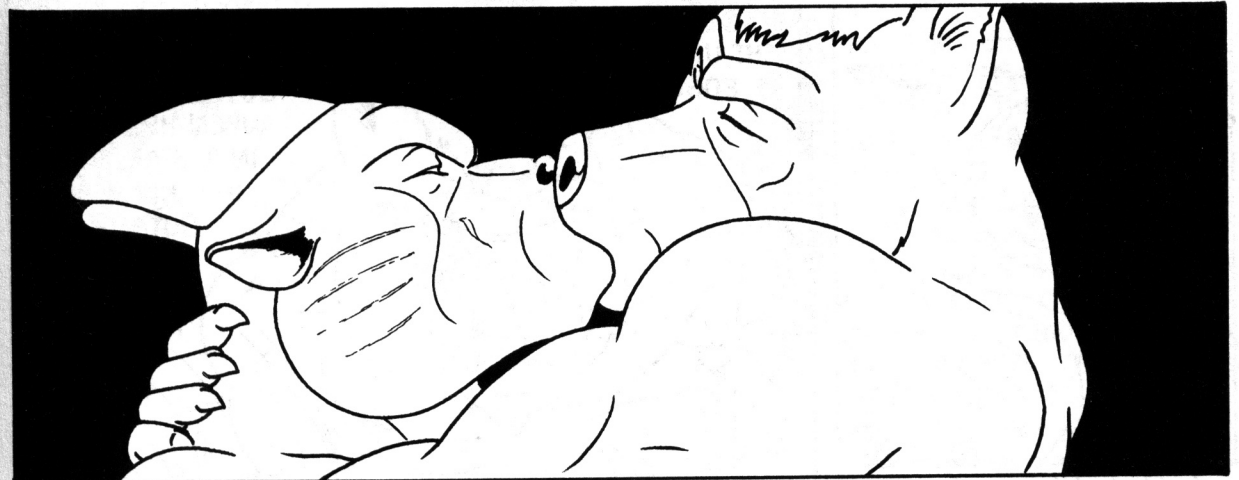
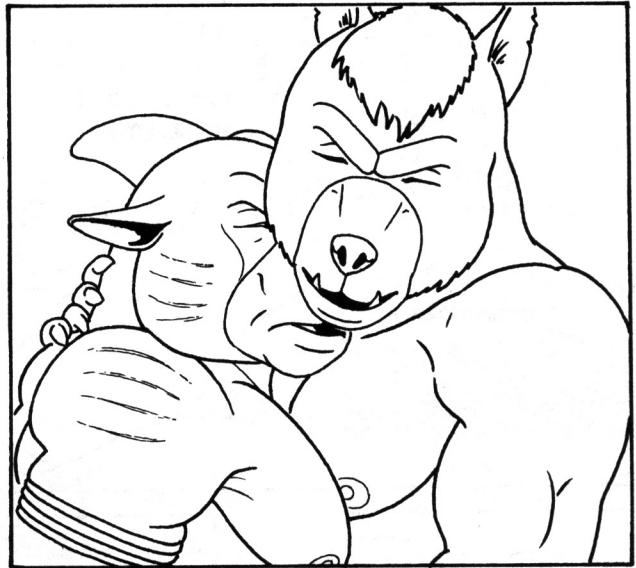
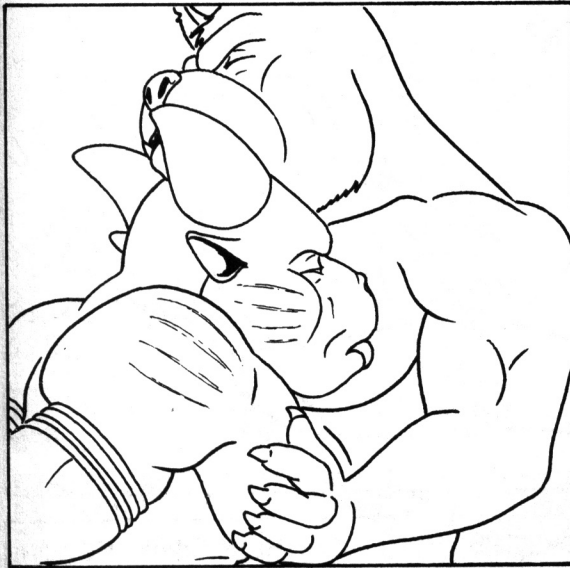
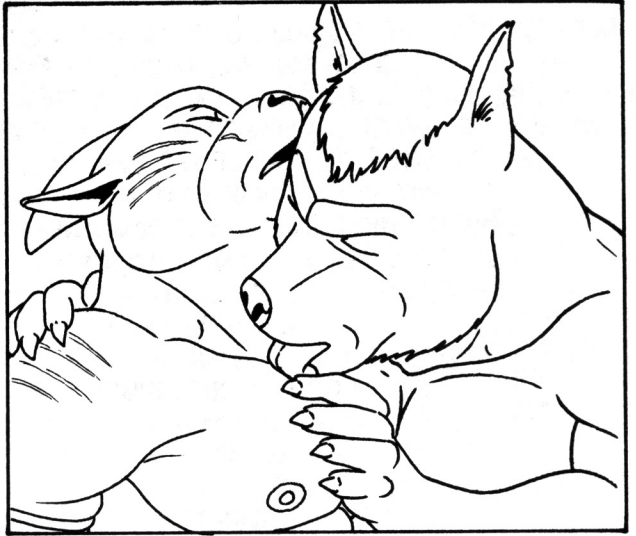


WHAT AN ASTONISHING SIGHT! AT FIRST KIMM REFUSED TO BELIEVE HIS EYES. HE'D HALF EXPECTED A CHOPPING BLOCK, SOME KIND OF SACRIFICIAL ALTAR, BUT HERE INSTEAD WAS ONE OF THE MOST BEAUTIFUL GROTTA SPRINGS HE'D EVER SEEN. AFTER SUCH A LONG TERRIBLE JOURNEY IT WAS LIKE WAKING FROM A DREAM.









KREEG SPENT ALMOST AN HOUR BATHING KIMMS BODY. ONCE OUT OF THE POOL HE LICKED EACH WOUND THOROUGHLY EXPLAINING, TO KIMMS SURPRISED STARE, THEY WOULD HEAL FASTER THAT WAY. THEN HE UNTIED KIMM AND HANDED HIM SOME APPLES AND PEARS OUT OF THE BAG. KREEG SAT DOWN TO EAT SOME MEAT. KIMM STOOD A MINUTE THEN, SLOWLY, SAT DOWN NEAR HIM. THEY ATE IN SILENCE AND, AFTERWARD, JUST SAT AND LOOKED AT EACH OTHER FOR AWHILE.

FINALLY, KIMM SAID, "I DON'T UNDERSTAND. WHY DON'T YOU JUST TAKE WHAT YOU WANT?" KREEG WAS QUIET THEN SAID, "I WATCHED YOU AND YOUR FRIEND MAKE LOVE."



A FEW DAYS BEFORE THE OTHERS LEFT KIMM ALONE KREEG SCOUTED RIGHT UP TO THE EDGE

OF THEIR CAMP. HE MADE IT AROUND, DOWNWIND, OF THE RAM ON GUARD AND WAS HEADING OUT THE OTHER SIDE WHEN HE STOPPED. IN A SMALL CLEARING KIMM AND GOTAN-SUD WERE STANDING IN THE MOONLIGHT.







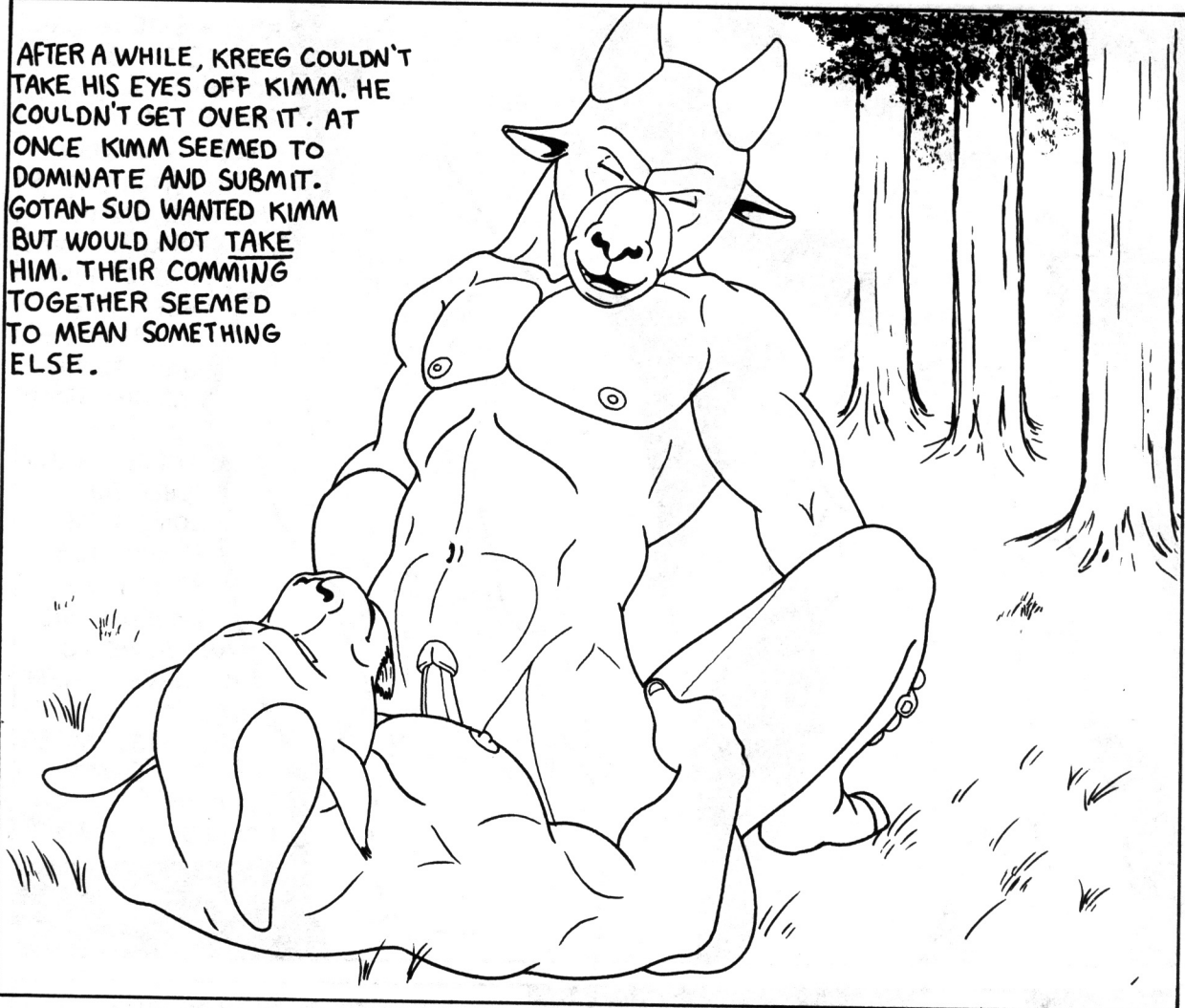
KREEG SAID HE WAS IMPRESSED BY GOTAN-SUD. HUGE, POWERFULL, HE HAD KILLED TWO WOLVES DURING THEIR RAIDS AND THE ENTIRE HUNTING PARTY WAS AFRAID OF HIM.

KREEG ADMITTED HE WAS TOO. HE WATCHED THEM AS THEY STOOD QUIETLY AND LOOKED AT EACH OTHER FOR A LONG TIME. SLOWLY, HIS ATTENTION TURNED MORE AND MORE TO KIMM-VEL. "THERE WAS SOMETHING IN YOUR EYES," KREEG WENT ON. "SOMETHING ABOUT THE WAY YOU LOOKED AT HIM...."

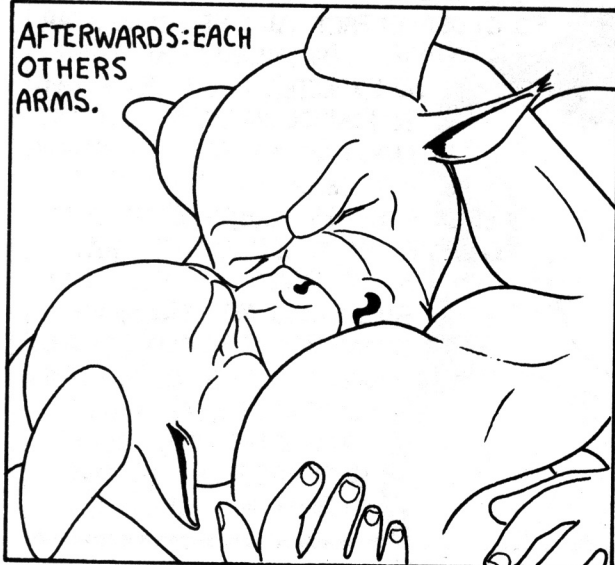


KREEG HAD CREPT AS CLOSE AS HE COULD. SO CLOSE, IN FACT, THAT HE COULD HEAR THEIR SLOW, HEAVY BREATHING. HE EXPECTED THE LARGER RAM TO POUNCE ON THE SMALLER AT ANY MOMENT, SATISFY HIMSELF AND LEAVE HIM TWISTED AND SOBBING. KREEG WANTED TO BE UP CLOSE TO SEE THAT. BUT IT NEVER HAPPENED. GOTAN-SUD STOOD MOTIONLESS WHILE KIMM-VEL STROKED, FONDLED AND NUZZLED TO HIS HEARTS CONTENT. KREEG HAD BEEN FASCINATED. THE LARGER, STRONGER OF THE TWO SUBMITTING LIKE A PUP.

AFTER A WHILE, KREEG COULDN'T TAKE HIS EYES OFF KIMM. HE COULDN'T GET OVER IT. AT ONCE KIMM SEEMED TO DOMINATE AND SUBMIT. GOTAN-SUD WANTED KIMM BUT WOULD NOT TAKE HIM. THEIR COMMING TOGETHER SEEMED TO MEAN SOMETHING ELSE.



AFTERWARDS: EACH OTHERS ARMS.

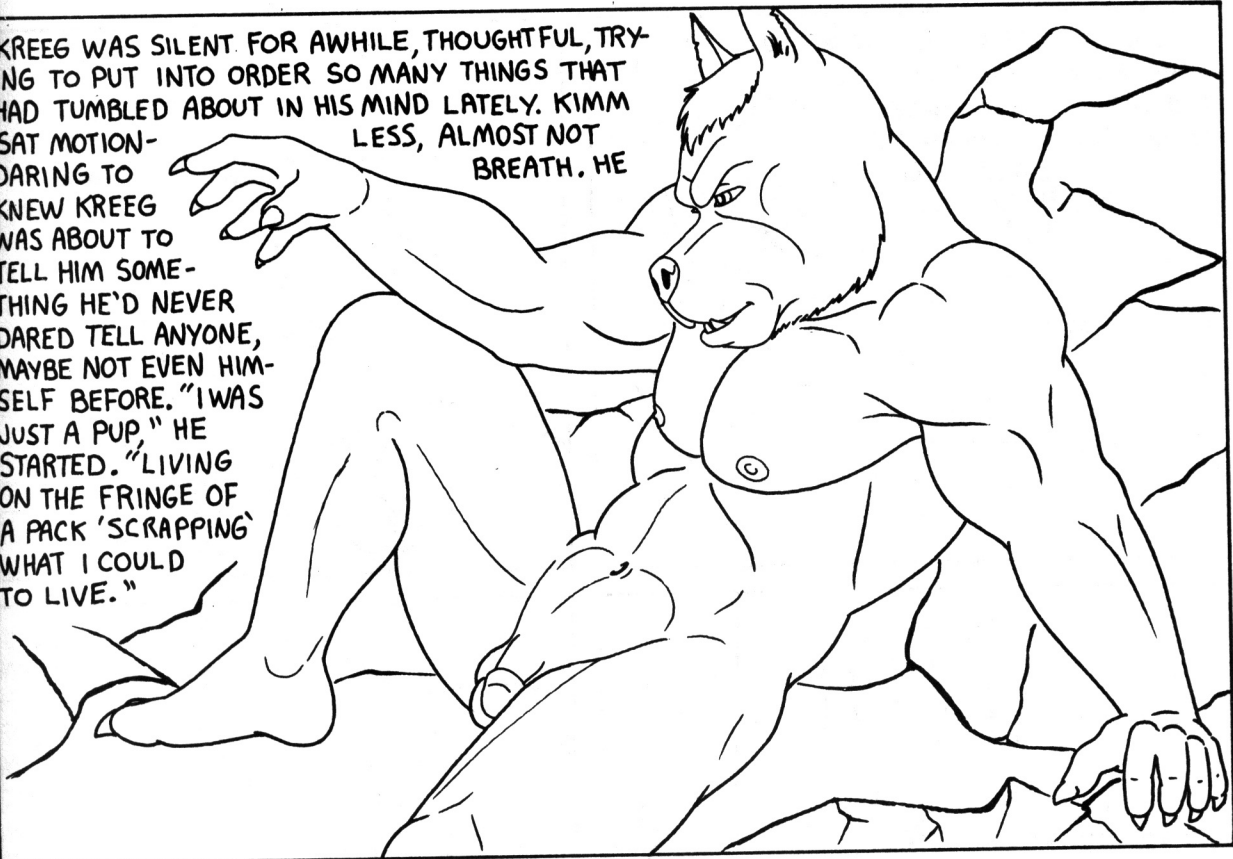


LONG AFTER KIMM AND GOTAN-SUD HAD RISEN AND GONE BACK TO THEIR CAMPFIRE, KREEG LAY IN HIS HIDING PLACE TRYING TO THINK, TO REMEMBER WHERE, WHEN IT WAS

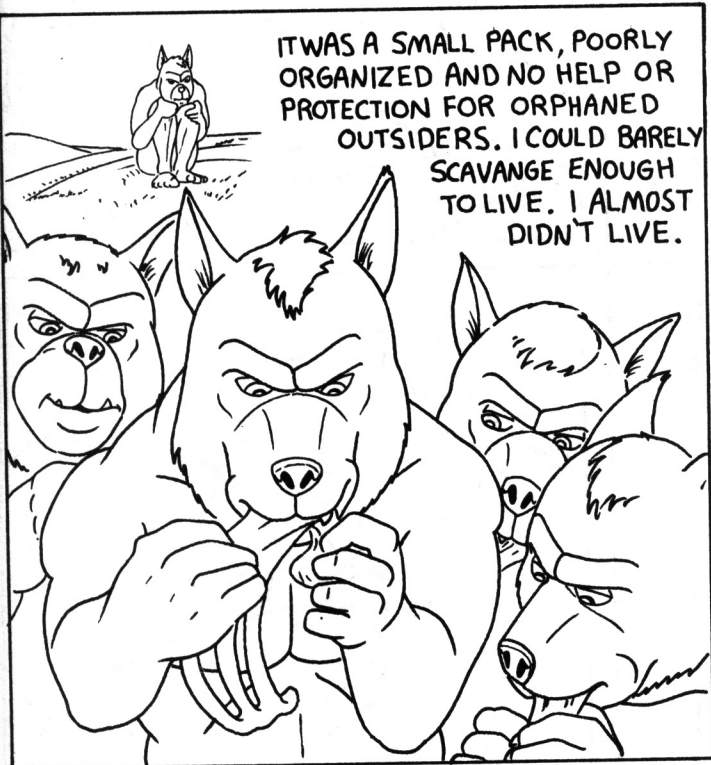
THAT HE'D HAD SOMETHING LIKE WHAT HE'D SEEN.



KREEG WAS SILENT FOR AWHILE, THOUGHTFUL, TRYING TO PUT INTO ORDER SO MANY THINGS THAT HAD TUMBLED ABOUT IN HIS MIND LATELY. KIMM SAT MOTION-DARING TO KNEW KREEG WAS ABOUT TO TELL HIM SOMETHING HE'D NEVER DARED TELL ANYONE, MAYBE NOT EVEN HIMSELF BEFORE. "I WAS JUST A PUP," HE STARTED. "LIVING ON THE FRINGE OF A PACK 'SCRAPPING' WHAT I COULD TO LIVE."

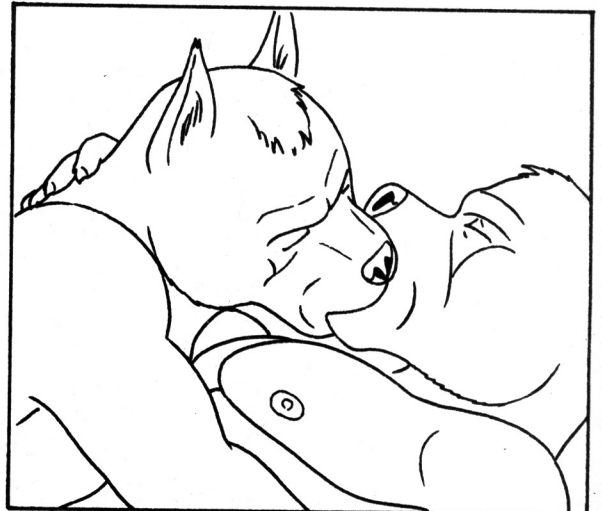
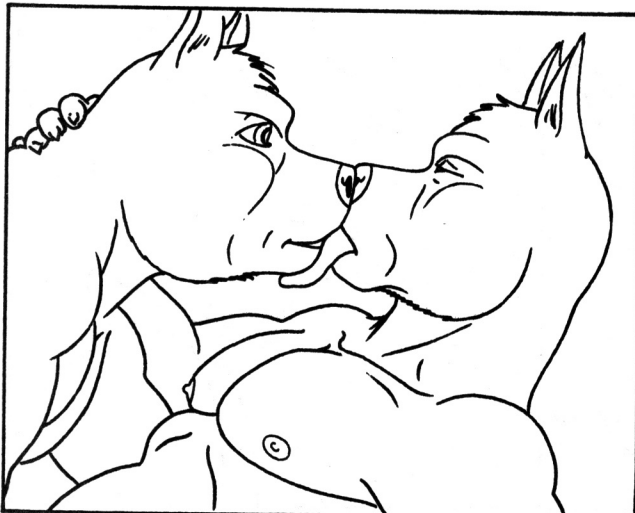
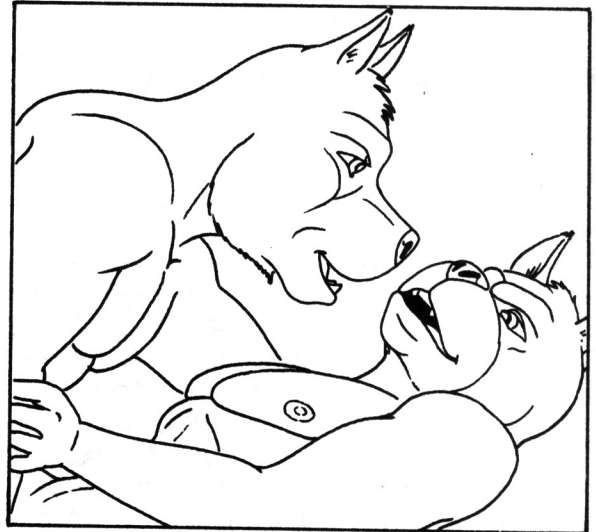
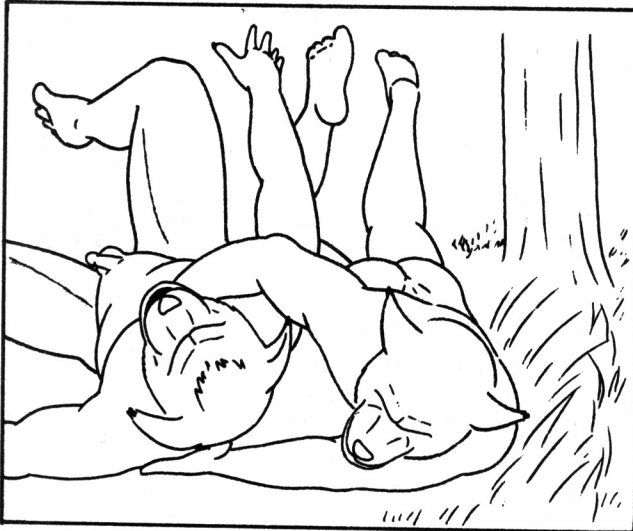
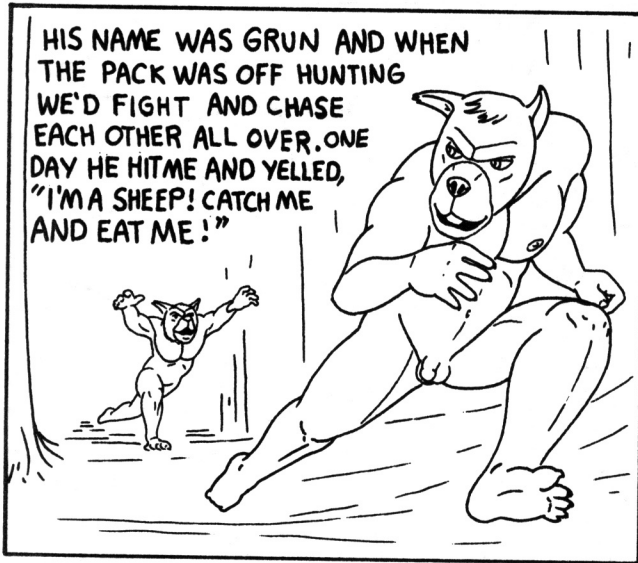


IT WAS A SMALL PACK, POORLY ORGANIZED AND NO HELP OR PROTECTION FOR ORPHANED OUTSIDERS. I COULD BARELY SCAVANGE ENOUGH TO LIVE. I ALMOST DIDN'T LIVE.

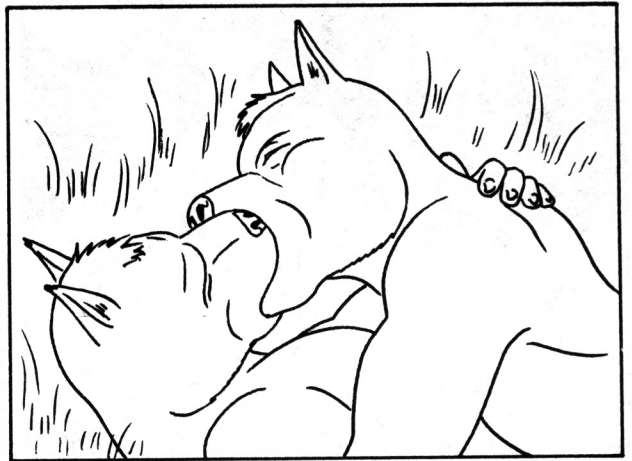
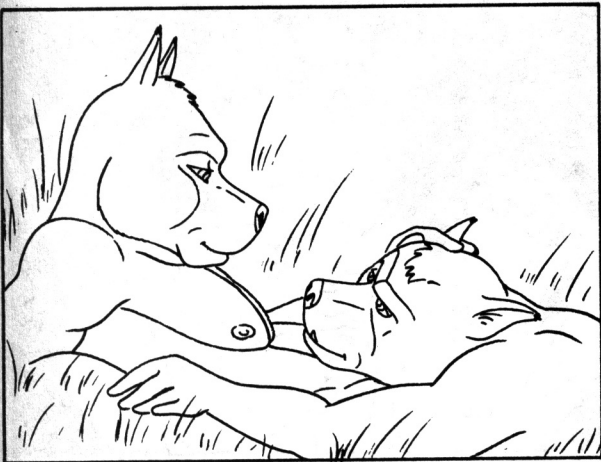


BUT ANOTHER YOUNG WOLF INSIDE THE PACK LIKED ME AND SHARED HIS PORTIONS WHENEVER HE COULD.



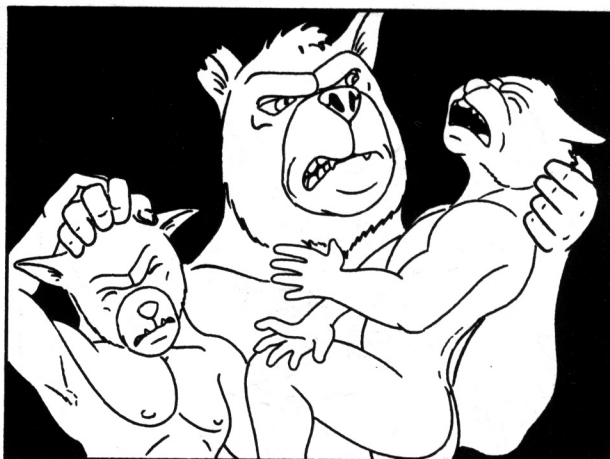




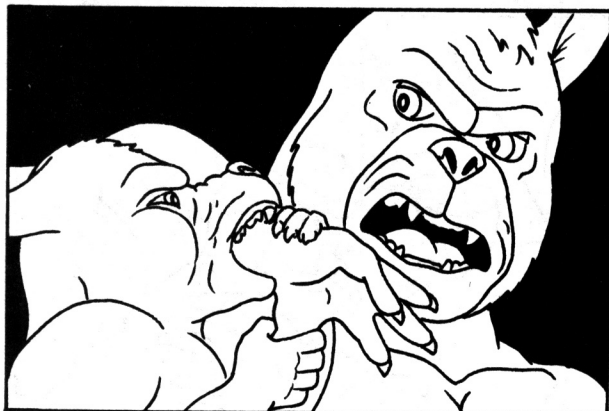


THAT SUMMER GRUN WAS ALL THERE WAS IN THE WHOLE WORLD. EVERY TIME I LOOKED INTO HIS EYES I FORGOT I WAS HUNGRY AND SCARED AND SAW NO FUTURE FOR MYSELF. IT SEEMED LIKE AS LONG AS HE WAS THERE I WOULD ALWAYS HAVE SOMETHING. I COULDN'T REMEMBER MY LIFE BEFORE HIM AND I COULDN'T EVEN THINK ABOUT WHAT MY LIFE WOULD BE WITHOUT HIM. WE BOTH LIVED FOR THE DAYS THE PACK WOULD BE OFF HUNTING WHEN WE COULD ROLL AND TUMBLE TO OUR HEARTS CONTENT WITHOUT ANY FEAR OF BEING PUNISHED BY ANY PACK ELDERS FOR "PLAYING TOO CLOSE."





THEN, THE WHOLE WORLD EXPLODED. WE DIDN'T EXPECT THE DAMN HUNTING PARTY BACK FOR ANOTHER TWO DAYS, AT LEAST! WE WERE LAYING TOGETHER, OUT IN THE OPEN UNDER THE MOONLIGHT, WHEN GRUNS' FATHER, OF ALL PEOPLE, STUMBLES RIGHT INTO US. HE LOST HIS FUCKING MIND? HE SCREAMED AND SHOUTED AND SHOOK US SO HARD I THOUGHT MY NECK WOULD SNAP. HE DRAGGED US ALONG YELLING HE WAS GOING TO TAKE US BACK TO THE REST OF THE PACK AND KILL US BOTH AS AN EXAMPLE TO THE OTHERS. THEN I LOST IT. I GRABBED HIS HAND, TWISTED IT OUT OF MY HAIR AND BIT HIM AS HARD AS I COULD. I COULD HEAR BONES SNAPPING. HE DROPPED ME AND THE OTHERS CHASED ME OFF.

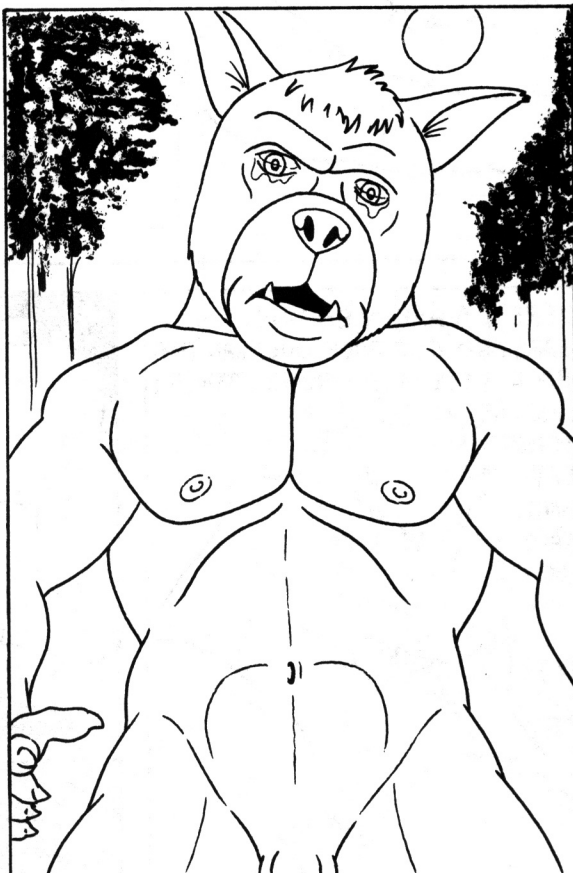




FOR TWO DAYS I SPIED ON THE PACK TRYING TO CATCH SOME SIGHT OF GRUN. I THOUGHT IF I COULD GET TO HIM I'D CONVINCE HIM TO LEAVE THE PACK WITH ME. WE COULD FIND SOMETHING FOR OURSELVES IN SOME OTHER PART OF THE WORLD.



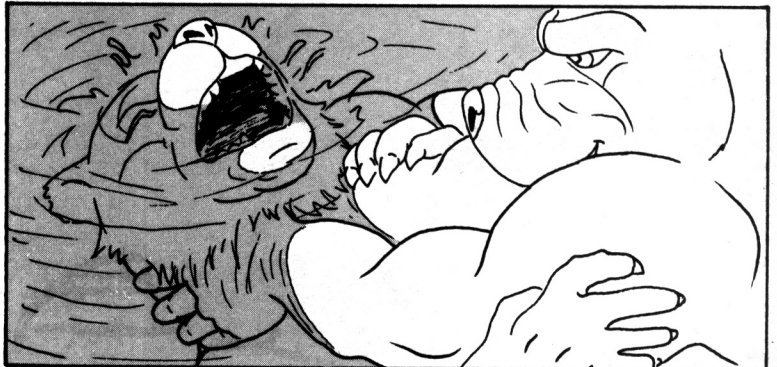
ON THE THIRD NIGHT I WAS CROSSING A SMALL STREAM NOT FAR FROM THE PACK AND BUMPED INTO SOMETHING.



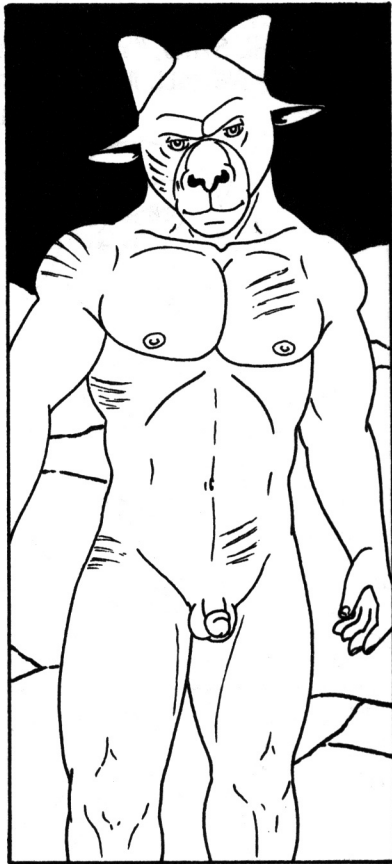
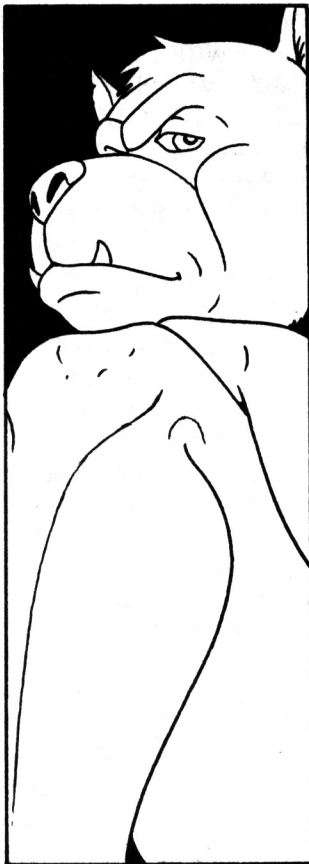
I COULDN'T UNDERSTAND IT ! WHY?! WHY WAS IT MORE IMPORTANT TO GRUN'S FATHER TO HAVE HIS SON DEAD THAN IN MY ARMS . WHERE COULD SUCH A HORRIBLE ANGER COME FROM? I DON'T KNOW HOW LONG I STOOD THERE . I JUST COULDN'T BELIEVE GRUN WAS GONE FOREVER.



THERE'S A HAPPY ENDING. FIVE YEARS AGO OUR PACK OVERRAN THAT GROUP. I SPOTTED GRUNS FATHER; TORN EAR, WITHERED LEFT HAND. I SAID HELLO.







KREEG CHUCKLED HOARSLY. "I KNOW, IT DOESN'T MAKE ANY SENSE," HE SAID. "YES, I CAME THERE WITH THE OTHERS TO STEAL THE SHEEP AND KILL ANYONE IN THE WAY. BUT WHEN I SAW YOU UP CLOSE..., I CAN'T DESCRIBE IT. IT'S LIKE YOU WERE GRUN, ALIVE AGAIN, OR MAYBE HE WAS YOU A LONG TIME AGO. SUDDENLY, YOU WEREN'T THE ENEMY ANY MORE. YOU HAD A FACE AND A BODY AND FEELINGS AND I WANTED TO HOLD ALL THAT IN MY ARMS AGAIN. WHEN I BURIED GRUN I BURIED WHAT LITTLE THERE WAS IN ME THAT COULD CARE ABOUT ANYTHING. I THOUGHT, WITH YOU, I COULD SOMEHOW GET IT BACK AGAIN."

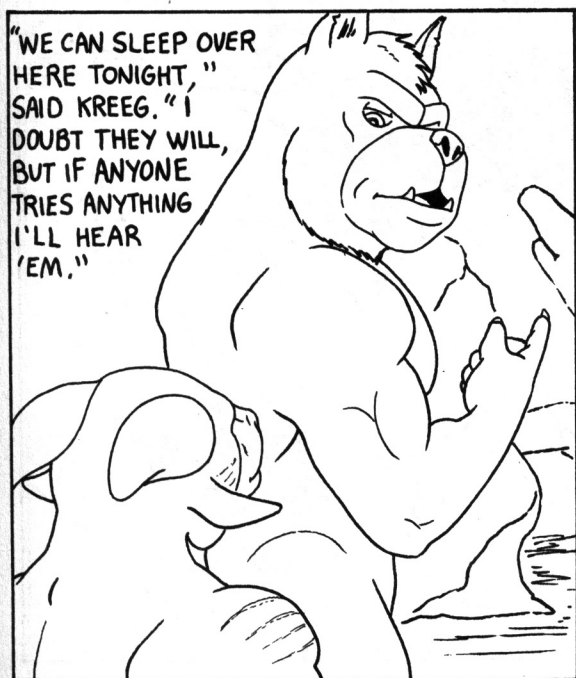
"I'M NOT IN YOU," SAID NO. MUCH OF A POSITION TO STOP KIMM. "WHAT IF I SAID

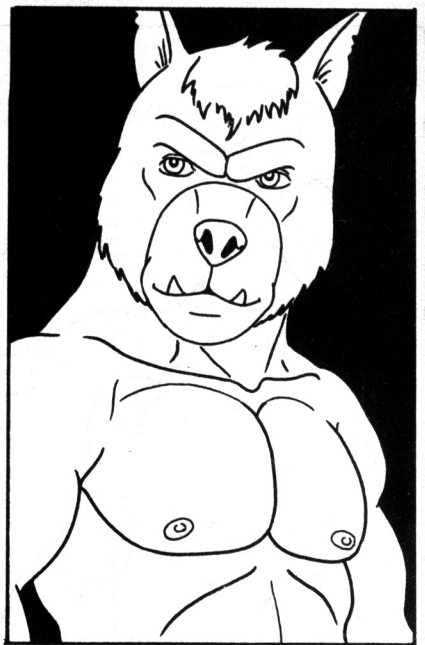
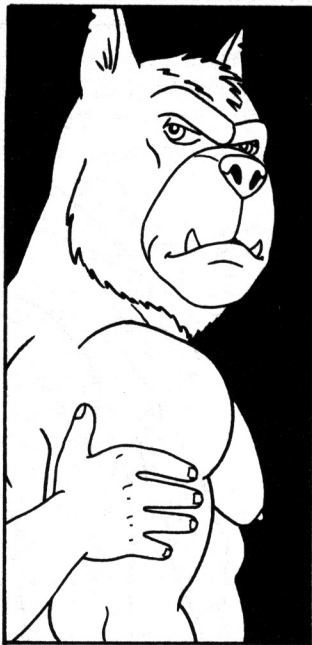
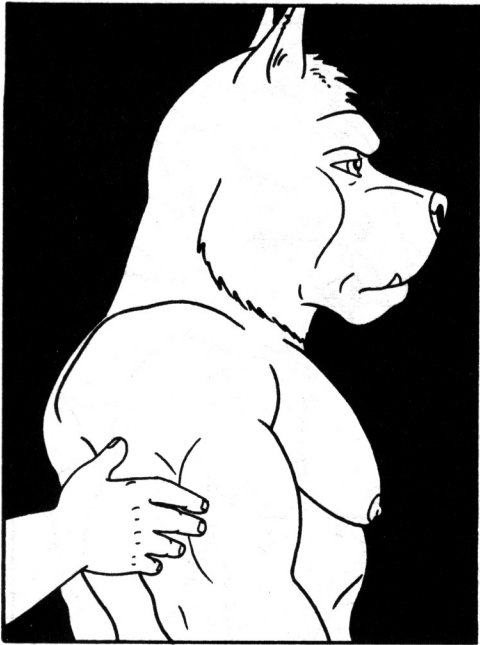
"I WON'T TAKE YOU," SAID KREEG. "I'LL PROTECT YOU UNTIL I CAN FIND SOME WAY TO GET YOU BACK HOME."

"YOU'D REALLY DO THAT," SAID KIMM. "IF THE OTHERS FOUND THAT OUT THEY'D KILL YOU FOR SURE."

YOU'D DO THAT FOR ME?"

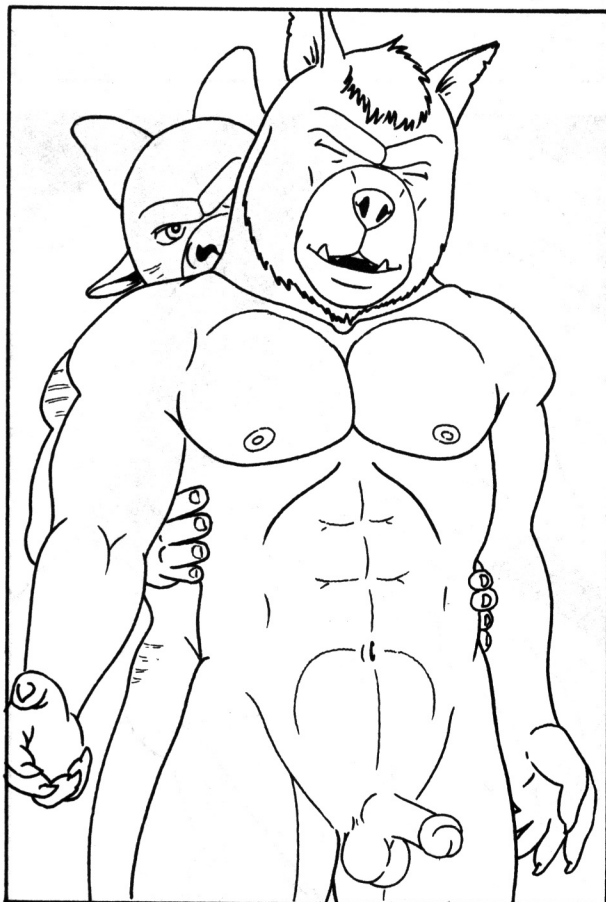
"YES," SAID KREEG. "I LOST YOU, WHAT YOU ARE, ONCE, A LONG TIME AGO. IT WON'T HAPPEN AGAIN? NO ONE'S GONNA HURT YOU IF I HAVE TO FIGHT EVERY ONE OF THEM."









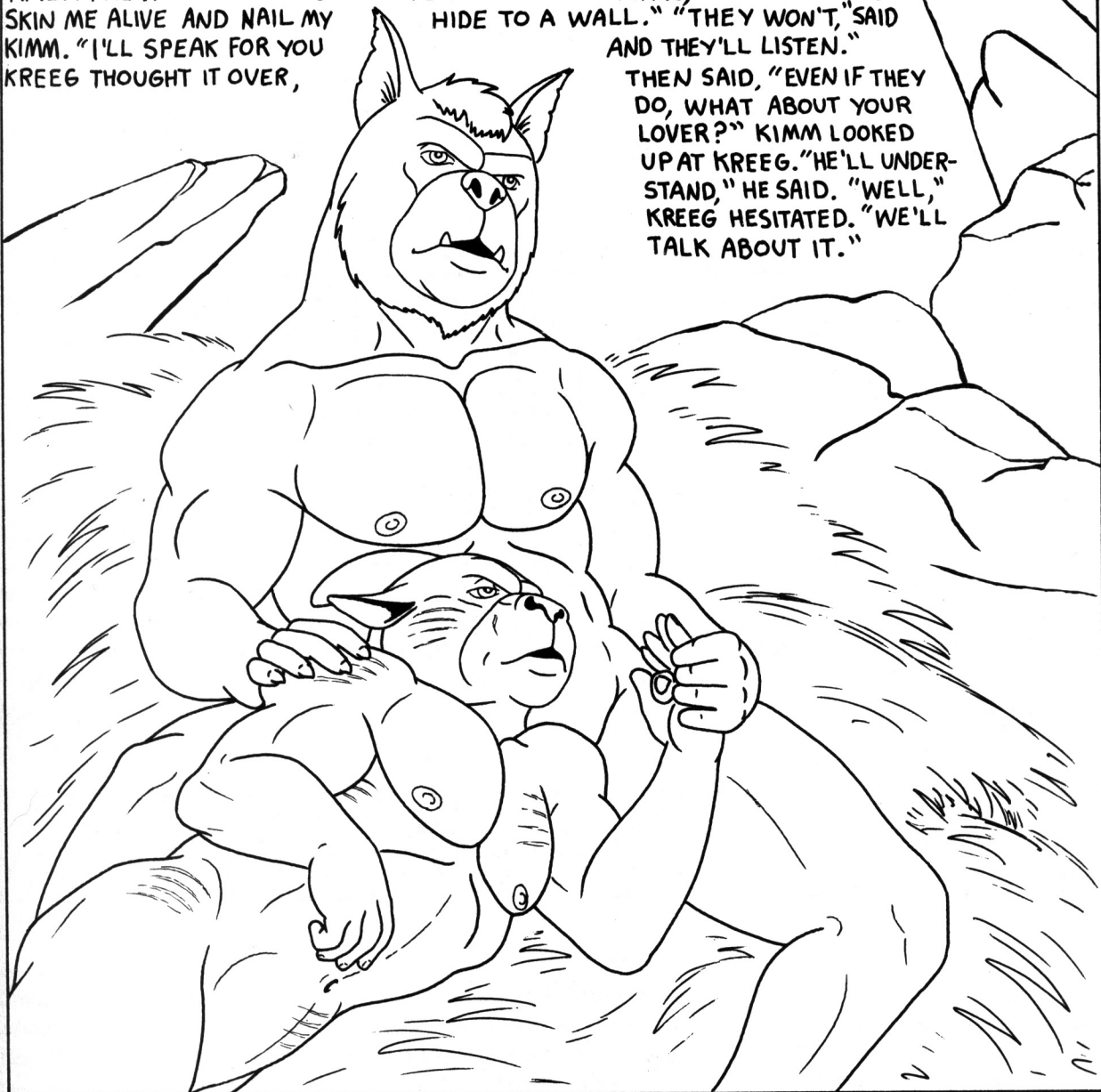






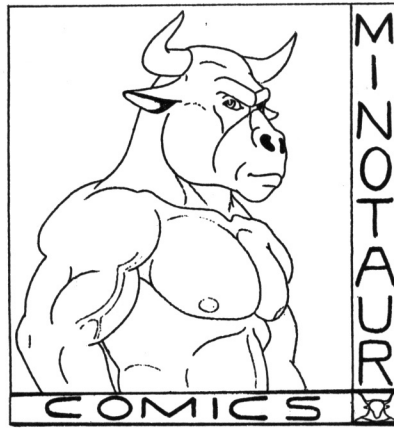
IT TOOK MANY HOURS FOR THE PASSION OF THAT FIRST EXTRAORDINARY ENCOUNTER TO SUBSIDE. SOON IT WOULD BE MORNING. KIMM-VEL, A RAM FROM ACROSS THE MOUNTAINS AND KREEG, A WOLF FROM THE LARGEST PACK IN THAT FORREST, KNEW THERE WERE SOME CLOSE AND DANGEROUS TIMES JUST AHEAD OF THEM. THE TRUTH WAS, NEITHER WAS SURE THEY COULD SURVIVE IT. BUT EVEN SO, THOUGH NEITHER COMPLETELY REALIZED IT THEN, THEY BOTH KNEW THEY WOULD TRY TOGETHER. FOR NOW, DRAINED, EXHAUSTED AND STILL NOT WANTING TO SLEEP, IT WAS ENOUGH JUST TO LAY TOGETHER, TO BE IN EACH OTHERS ARMS. "KREEG," SAID KIMM. "I CAN'T STAY HERE. NO MATTER WHAT WE DO YOUR PEOPLE WILL NEVER ACCEPT US." "I KNOW," SAID KREEG. "BUT WHAT CAN WE DO? HOW CAN I LET YOU GO NOW?" KIMM WAS SILENT A WHILE, THINKING AS HARD AS HIS WEARY MIND WOULD ALLOW. THEN HE SAID, "COME BACK TO MY VILLAGE WITH ME." KREEG CHUCKLED. "AFTER ALL WE'VE DONE TO YOUR PEOPLE OVER THE YEARS," HE SAID. "THEY'D SKIN ME ALIVE AND NAIL MY HIDE TO A WALL." "THEY WON'T," SAID KIMM. "I'LL SPEAK FOR YOU KREEG." KREEG THOUGHT IT OVER,

AND THEY'LL LISTEN."  
THEN SAID, "EVEN IF THEY DO, WHAT ABOUT YOUR LOVER?" KIMM LOOKED UP AT KREEG. "HE'LL UNDERSTAND," HE SAID. "WELL," KREEG HESITATED. "WE'LL TALK ABOUT IT."









# NEXT ISSUE

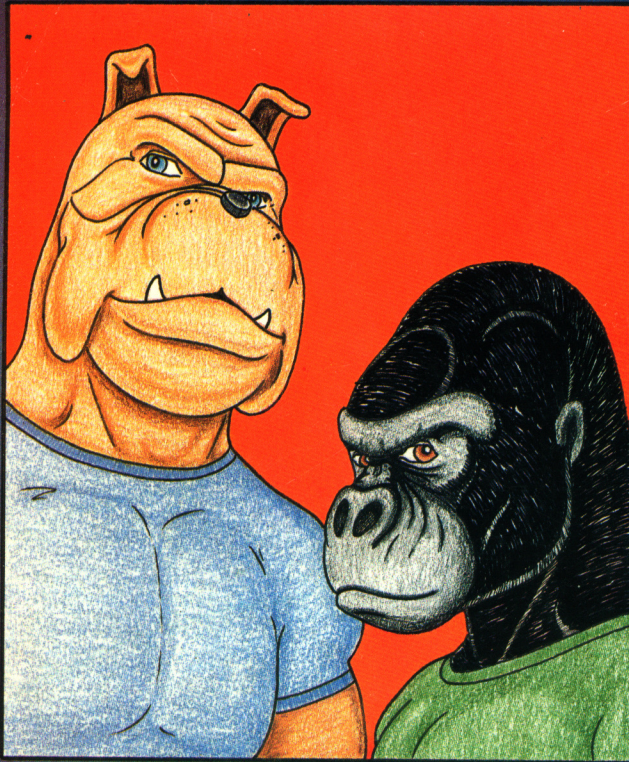
# SPIKE

These are strange times. Economic hardship, mindless self-centered values and all manner of political, social, and religious scapegoating have unleashed a deluge of fear and uncertainty in our communities. Personal freedoms are under attack and the gay community has become the number one prime target. And in the midst of all this Spike has to come to terms with the end of the most important relationship he's ever had. Other gay "Roughs" are there to help but Geneti-Chem is about to make its first move - sparking a war within a war - and changing everyone's priorities real fast.

# AFTEREARTH

Kimm-Vel comes face-to-face with the pack and all Hell breaks loose. Old conflicts and grievances spring up from just under the surface polarizing the wolves into different groups. Everyone knows that if Kimm-Vel is allowed to live, irreparable damage will be done to the spirit that holds the pack together. Something has to be done and before it's over Kimm-Vel must face the greatest danger he's ever had in his life. And Kreeg can't help him!





# SPIKE AFTEREARTH

Way back in the 1950's, something happened in Chicago that a lot of people hoped the rest of us would never find out about. Hundreds of babies, delivered in and around the city, were born deformed. No one could explain it and, after some initial curiosity, no one wanted to. Everyone just prayed that the poor creatures wouldn't survive. Well, a lot of them did and have spent their whole lives struggling to maintain their place in a world they know they belong to, but which doesn't want them. And, if things weren't bad enough in this kinder, gentler America of ours, the first warning signs of an enormous, insidious plan are beginning to appear to those "Roughs" in the gay community.

The distant future of Earth is one in which the descendants of a genetically-altered people struggle to survive on a world long since abandoned by man. Originally bred to do all of the most dangerous work that men would no longer do, they were left behind to perish with a planet thought sure to be destroyed by an enlarging sun. However, it didn't happen and the "people" in their new world struggled against, fought, and killed each other just as they had been taught in the old world. But, sometimes, change starts small, between two people under the strangest of circumstances.

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